

Tips for Teachers: Teaching Students with Disabilities



Resources Developed by:



National
Dissemination
Center for Children
with Disabilities

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*The tips for teachers were excerpted from documents developed by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. To see the complete set of fact sheets, please visit the NICHCY website, <http://www.nichey.org/disabinf.asp#fs19>. The full fact sheet defines the disability, describes its characteristics, and offers tips for parents and teachers. Each ends with a very helpful list of resources in print or video and disability organizations that can offer more information and assistance.

Tips for Teachers:

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

(AD/HD)

Provide More Direct Instruction and As Much One-On-One Instruction As Possible

- Use guided instruction.
- Teach and practice organization and study skills in every subject area.
- Lecture less.
- Design lessons so that students have to *actively* respond - get up, move around, go to the board, move in their seats.
- Design highly motivating and enriching curriculum with ample opportunity for hands-on activities and movement.
- Eliminate repetition from tasks or use more novel ways to practice.
- Design tasks of low to moderate frustration levels.
- Use computers in instruction.
- Challenge but don't overwhelm.
- Change evaluation methods to suit the child's learning styles and strengths.

Provide Supports to Promote On-Task Behavior

- Pair the student with a study buddy or learning partner who is an exemplary student.
- Provide frequent feedback.
- Structure tasks.
- Monitor independent work.
- Schedule difficult subjects at the student's most productive time.
- Use mentoring and peer tutoring.
- Provide frequent and regularly scheduled breaks.
- Set timers for specific tasks.

- Call attention to schedule changes.
- Maintain frequent communication between home and school.
- Do daily/weekly progress reports.
- Teach conflict resolution and peer mediation skills.

Provide Supports to Promote Executive Function

-To support planning:

- Teach the student to use assignment pads, day planners or time schedules, task organizers and outlines
- Teach study skills and practice them frequently and in all subjects

-To increase organization:

- Allow time during school day for locker and backpack organization
- Allow time for student to organize materials and assignments for homework
- Have the student create a master notebook-a 3-ring binder where the student *organizes* (rather than stuffs) papers
- Limit number of folders used; have the student use hole-punched paper and clearly label all binders on spines; monitor notebooks
- Have daily and weekly organization and clean up routines
- Provide frequent checks of work and systems for organization

-To improve follow through:

- Create work completion routines
- Provide opportunities for self-correction
- Accept late work
- Give partial credit for work partially completed

-To improve self-control:

- Prepare the student for transitions
- Display rules
- Give behavior prompts
- Have clear consequences
- Provide the student with time to de-stress

- Allow doodling or other appropriate, mindless motor movement
- Use activity as a reward
- Provide more supervision

Memory Boosters

-To assist with working memory:

- Focus on one concept at a time
- List all steps
- Write all work down
- Use reading guides and plot summaries
- Teach note-taking skills-let the student use a study buddy or teacher-prepared notes to fill in gaps
- List all key points on board
- Provide summaries, study guides, outlines, and lists
- Let the student use the computer

-To assist with memory retrieval:

- Teach the student memory strategies (grouping, chunking, mnemonic devices)
- Practice sorting main ideas and details
- Teach information and organization skills
- Make necessary test accommodations (allow open book tests; use word banks; use other memory cues; test in preferred modality-e.g., orally, fill in blank; give frequent quizzes instead of lengthy tests)

Attention Getters and Keepers

-For problems beginning tasks:

- Repeat directions
- Increase task structure
- Highlight or color code directions and other important parts
- Teach the student keyword underlining skills
- Summarize key information

- Give visual cues

- Have the class start together

- For problems sticking with and finishing tasks:*

- Add interest and activity to tasks

- Divide larger tasks into easily completed segments

- Shorten overall tasks

- Allow the student choice in tasks

- Limit lecture time

- Call on the student often

Tips for Teachers:

Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)

-Learn more about autism/PDD. Check out the research on effective instructional interventions and behavior on NICHCY's web site.

-Make sure directions are given step-by-step, verbally, visually, and by providing physical supports or prompts, as needed by the student. Students with autism spectrum disorders often have trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Be as concrete and explicit as possible in your instructions and feedback to the student.

-Find out what the student's strengths and interests are and emphasize them. Tap into those avenues and create opportunities for success. Give positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.

-Build opportunities for the student to have social/collaborative interactions throughout the regular school day. Provide support, structure, and lots of feedback.

-If behavior is a significant issue for the student, seek help from expert professional resources (including parents) to understand the meanings of the behaviors and to develop a unified, positive approach to resolving them.

-Have consistent routines and schedules. When you know a change in routine will occur (e.g., a field trip or assembly) *prepare* the student by telling him or her what is going to be different and what to expect or do. Reward students for each small success.

-Work together with the student's parents and other school personnel to create and implement an educational plan tailored to meet the student's needs. Regularly share information about how the student is doing at school and at home.

Tips for Teachers:

Learning Disabilities

-Learn as much as you can about the different types of LD.

-Seize the opportunity to make an enormous difference in this student's life! Find out and emphasize what the student's strengths and interests are. Give the student positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.

-Review the student's evaluation records to identify where *specifically* the student has trouble. Talk to specialists in your school (e.g., special education teacher) about methods for teaching this student. Provide instruction and accommodations to address the student's special needs. Examples include:

- breaking tasks into smaller steps, and giving directions verbally and in writing;
- giving the student more time to finish schoolwork or take tests;
- letting the student with reading problems use textbooks-on-tape (available through Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, listed under Organizations);
- letting the student with listening difficulties borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder; and
- letting the student with writing difficulties use a computer with specialized software that spell checks, grammar checks, or recognizes speech.

-Learn about the different testing modifications that can really help a student with LD show what he or she has learned.

-Teach organizational skills, study skills, and learning strategies. These help all students but are particularly helpful to those with LD.

-Work with the student's parents to create an educational plan tailored to meet the student's needs.

-Establish a positive working relationship with the student's parents. Through regular communication, exchange information about the student's progress at school.

Tips for Teachers:

Mental Retardation

- Learn as much as you can about mental retardation.
- Recognize that you can make an enormous difference in this student's life! Find out what the student's strengths and interests are, and emphasize them. Create opportunities for success.
- If you are not part of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, ask for a copy of his or her IEP. The student's educational goals will be listed there, as well as the services and classroom accommodations he or she is to receive. Talk to specialists in your school (e.g., special educators), as necessary. They can help you identify effective methods of teaching this student, ways to adapt the curriculum, and how to address the student's IEP goals in your classroom.
- Be as concrete as possible. Demonstrate what you mean rather than just giving verbal directions. Rather than just relating new information verbally, show a picture. And rather than just showing a picture, provide the student with hands-on materials and experiences and the opportunity to try things out.
- Break longer, new tasks into small steps. Demonstrate the steps. Have the student do the steps, one at a time. Provide assistance, as necessary.
- Give the student immediate feedback.
- Teach the student life skills such as daily living, social skills, and occupational awareness and exploration, as appropriate. Involve the student in group activities or clubs.
- Work together with the student's parents and other school personnel to create and implement an educational plan tailored to meet the student's needs. Regularly share information about how the student is doing at school and at home.

Tips for Teachers: Traumatic Brain Injury

- Find out as much as you can about the child's injury and his or her present needs. Find out more about TBI.
- Give the student more time to finish schoolwork and tests.
- Give directions one step at a time. For tasks with many steps, it helps to give the student written directions.
- Show the student how to perform new tasks. Give examples to go with new ideas and concepts.
- Have consistent routines. This helps the student know what to expect. If the routine is going to change, let the student know ahead of time.
- Check to make sure that the student has actually learned the new skill. Give the student lots of opportunities to practice the new skill.
- Show the student how to use an assignment book and a daily schedule. This helps the student get organized.
- Realize that the student may get tired quickly. Let the student rest as needed.
- Reduce distractions.
- Keep in touch with the student's parents. Share information about how the student is doing at home and at school.
- Be flexible about expectations. Be patient. Maximize the student's chances for success.