Early Childhood Teacher Tips:

Including Children with Special Needs in Classroom Activities

Children with special needs can benefit from most or all program activities when adaptations are made to ensure their participation. The following are some suggestions for accommodating children with different types of needs.

**Learning differences and disabilities (LD)** - Provide extra help by organizing information and assisting with tasks: (not usually identified in Early Childhood)

- Eliminate or reduce background noise and clutter as much as possible.
- Post picture and word sequences of schedules and routines in prominent places.
- Make suggestions that give children clues or choices for the next step in an activity.
- Have quiet places in the room.
- Show children how to use the tools and materials in the classroom.
- Keep transitions to a minimum.
- Break tasks into smaller steps, and giving directions verbally and in writing
- Provide high structure and clear expectations
- Use short sentences and simple vocabulary

**Intellectual Disability (ID)** - Accommodate a slower pace of learning. Concrete modeling and demonstration are key strategies:

- Allow lots of time for children to respond with actions or speech.
- Use lots of repetition and demonstration throughout the day.
- Give frequent and immediate feedback.
- Combine visual and verbal directions; increasingly use verbal cues alone as children become better able to interpret them.
- Sing directions for a task.
- Be as concrete as possible. Demonstrate what you mean rather than just giving verbal directions.
- Use pictures and hands on materials and experiences
- Break longer, new tasks into small steps. Have the student do the steps, one at a time and provide assistance as necessary (gradual release).

**Speech and language impairments (SI)** - Communication in any form is an important goal. Plan experiences that will motivate children to give and receive messages:

- Verbalize what children are telling you with their actions.
- Give only one verbal direction at a time.
- Reduce background noise as much as possible; avoid background music.
- Provide language experiences with repetitive sounds, phrases, and sentences, such as simple poetry, repetitive stories, and action stories and songs.
• Show pictures of what children have just been doing to encourage them to talk about it.
• Allow the student to sit near the teacher.
• Provide peer assistance when appropriate.
• Accommodate activities, when appropriate to be written instead of oral or vice versa.
• When introducing new vocabulary, help the student practice the difficult words. Dividing words into syllables and pronouncing each syllable will improve speech, reading and writing.

**Auditory Impairment (AI)** - Use visual attention-getters to help orient children to what is happening:

• Avoid background noise.
• Face children whenever possible; speak using a clear voice and facial expressions.
• Use manual gestures or motions when talking, singing, or telling stories.
• Show objects to demonstrate what you are talking about.
• Sing along with song tapes to encourage children to lip-read.
• Learn basic signs (for yes, thank you, please, stop, and so on) to communicate with children and model appropriate social behavior.
• Allow favorable seating in the class to facilitate lip reading.
• Frequently ask questions to check for understanding.
• Speak slowly and face the student when speaking to a child with an auditory impairment. Do not over enunciate.
• Avoid positions that distract from a clear view of adult’s face (i.e., glare from a window).

**Visual Impairments (VI)** - Encourage the children’s use of hearing and touch to explore the environment:

• Keep pathways in the room wide, consistently located, and free of obstructions.
• Describe what you are doing as you do it; include actions as well as things.
• Use large, clear, tactile labels (including braille) to identify areas, tools, and materials.
• Use play dough and other modeling, molding, and sensory materials.
• Provide many put-together/take-apart toys and building sets throughout the room.
• Provide many tactile-auditory experiences, and use language in conjunction with them.
• Encourage children to explore all parts of an object; discuss part-whole relationships.
• Help children feel motions; for example, put your hands on a child’s shoulders while he or she is swaying to music.
• Demonstrate activities that involve spatial concept, such as on/off, up/down, and in/out.
• Encourage sighted children to be observers for visually impaired children by explain what they are doing and how. (This is mutually beneficial)
• Encourage other children to identify themselves and their actions as they approach their classmate.
- Record each child’s voice and have children guess who it is. This helps visually impaired children match names with voices and is fun for the other children, too.
- Allow the student to look at tasks up close if needed
- Allow the student to use any prescribed low vision devices (hand-held telescope, magnifier, etc.)
- Consult frequently with the teacher for students with a visual impairment (TVI).

**Orthopedic impairments (OI)**-Match strategies to the children’s range of physical disabilities:

- Make pathways wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, body boards, and other devices.
- Keep the classroom uncluttered, with easy-to-reach shelves, cubbies, sink, and so on.
- Use lots of non-locomotor movement activities (anchored movement such as moving the arms with feet in place).
- Provide ample space at group time for children to maneuver.
- Modify classroom tools by adding handles or grips that are easier to grasp (for example, add triangular grips to brushes and felt pens, rubber bicycle hands over doorknobs).
- Encourage other children to provide physical assistance when asked (such as picking up a crayon, closing a child’s fingers around a handle).
- Plan floor activities for all the children.
- Use adapted battery or electric toys (such as remote-controlled cars) that allow children to control the toy’s movement.
- Be intentive—Ask yourself and others, “How can I adapt this lesson for this child to maximize active, hands-on learning?”
- Incorporate assistive technology that promotes independence

**Emotional Disturbances (ED)**-Children who have frequent behavioral difficulties, mood swings, and problems forming relationships need predictable routines and extra interpersonal support:

- Shadow children inconspicuously and offer encouraging smiles and phrases.
- Develop mutually understood signals to indicate when the child should stop a behavior or needs help.
- Provide for calming activities such as sensory materials, water play, and soothing music.
- Allow a withdrawn child to watch from a “safe” distance.
- Prevent aggressive children from hurting others; this benefits everyone.
- Provide soft lighting and cozy spaces.
- Label the feelings behind the child’s actions; help children to label feelings themselves.
- Read books about strong feelings, such as anger, and discuss them individually and with the group.
• Model coping strategies for when a child feels overwhelmed.
• Be sure to give the withdrawn child as much attention as the aggressive child.
• Establish simple concise classroom rules.
• Be consistent.
• Structure the environment so that time does not permit unrelated or inappropriate behavior.
• Reduce distracting stimuli.
• Speak to the student explaining what they are doing wrong, what they should be doing and the reason.
• Provide praise/encouragement and positive reinforcement
• Set up reasonable task expectations and remain consistent in consequences.
• Allow the student the opportunity to make choices.

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

• Give the student more time to finish schoolwork
  • Give directions one step at a time. For tasks with many steps, it helps to give the student written directions/visuals.
  • Reduce distractions.
  • Have consistent routines. This will help the student know what to expect and let the student know of any changes with as much time as possible.
  • Model new tasks/skills, check for understanding and ensure that the student has lots of opportunity to practice new skills.
• Provide frequent breaks as needed.

**Other Health Impaired (OHI)**

• Post daily schedule and rules-have set times for specific tasks and call attention to changes in the schedule
• Provide regularly scheduled breaks.
• Provide step by step instructions and make sure the student is following the direction. Give bother verbal and visual directions.

**Multiple Disabilities (MD)**

• Use a combination of tips/strategies for the multiple disabilities identified.

**Deaf-Blindness (DB)**

• Make sure the lighting is sufficient, without glare.
• Allow additional time for responding.
• Allow and encourage the student to use any low vision or communication devices recommended.
• Provide hands on experiences and opportunities.
• Incorporate multisensory strategies.

**Autism (AU)**

• Provide step by step directions verbally and visually providing physical supports or prompts as needed.
• Maintain a structured environment with a predictable schedule and consistent routines.
• Use of individual schedules to help with transitioning between parts of the daily routine. Let the student know of any changes with as much time as possible. Visual schedules and organizers assist with structure and task completion.
• Provide clear expectations for behaviors and rules.
• Pair visuals with verbal prompts/commands.
• Provide immediate and frequent feedback.
• Build opportunities for the student to have social and collaborative interactions throughout the day. Provide support, structure and a lot of feedback.

• Break down directions into short, simple, statements. The use of predictable and consistent language is also a key to helping the child process and respond to the direction or task at hand.
• Be aware of sensory stimulation in the environment, and help the child plan ahead and anticipate sensory input. Also, use sensory input to help the child de-escalate behavior or focus attention.
• Reduce the level of distractions and stimulation so that they child can attend to language.
• Provide multiple opportunities to practice targeted/desired behavior in various settings

**Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC)**

• Follow the tips associated with the disability connected to the Non-Categorical label (ex: NC-AU, NC-ID, etc.)