

Accommodating All Children in the Early Childhood Classroom

Accommodating a child with specific needs is a continual process that involves each child's collaborative team. Teaching staff can create an inclusive environment for children with special needs by implementing the following adaptations.

The activities and materials used in most early childhood classrooms are designed to meet the needs of many children with or without disabilities. When they do not meet the specific needs of a child, they can be adapted or expanded to accommodate that child's individual needs. The purpose of an adaptation is to assist children in compensating for intellectual, physical, or behavioral challenges. They allow children to use their current skills while promoting the acquisition of new skills. Adaptations can make the difference between a child merely being present in the class and a child being actively involved.

Developing adaptations and accommodations for a child with special needs is a continuous process that involves each child's collaborative team. The first step is to assess the child's abilities and the environment where the child will be spending time. Once the goals and objectives are identified and expectations for the child's participation in that environment are established, the team selects or creates adaptations and accommodations that address those needs. Once implemented, their effectiveness should be assessed on an ongoing basis and revised, as needed.

To meet the specific needs of a child, changes may need to be made in one or more of the following instructional conditions. Remember, when the child can participate in an activity, as it is, no changes need to be made.

- **Instructional groupings or arrangements** – For any given activity there are a number of instructional arrangements from which to choose: large groups, small groups, cooperative learning groups, peer partners, one-to-one instruction, and/or independent tasks.
- **Lesson format** - The format of a lesson may be altered to meet the needs of a child by including more opportunities for whole class discussions, games, role playing, activity-based lessons, experiential lessons, demonstrations, and/or thematic lesson organization.
- **Teaching strategies** - A change in teaching strategies can influence a child's ability to participate. Examples include: simplifying directions, addition of visual information, use of concrete materials/examples, sequencing learning tasks from easy to hard, repeated opportunities to practice skills, changes in the schedule of reinforcement, elaboration or shaping of responses, verbal prompts and/or direct physical assistance.
- **Curricular goals and learning outcomes** - To match the needs of a child within the context of an activity, it may be appropriate to individualize the learning objectives. This can often be accomplished using the same activities and materials. If children are working on a classification concept by sorting blocks, a child with a disability could participate in the same activity but focus of reaching, grasping, and releasing skills.
- **Adaptations to the method for responding** - Sometimes children may understand a concept yet need an adaptation in the way they demonstrate that knowledge. Use of augmentative communication systems, eye gaze, and demonstrations may better allow a child to demonstrate his/her skills.

- **Environmental conditions** - The environmental arrangement is an important aspect of any early childhood setting. Changes in lighting, noise level, visual and auditory input, physical arrangement of the room or equipment, and accessibility of materials are important considerations.
- **Modification of instructional materials** - It is sometimes necessary to physically adapt instructional or play materials to facilitate a child's participation. Materials can be physically adapted by increasing: stability (Dycem™ or Velcro™ on materials), ease of handling (adding handles, making materials larger), accessibility (developing a hand splint to hold materials, attaching an elastic cord or string to objects so they can be easily moved or retrieved), visual clarity or distinctiveness (adding contrast or specialized lighting), or size.
- **Level of personal assistance** - A child's need for assistance may range from periodic spot checks to close continuous supervision. Assistance may vary from day to day and be provided by adults or peers.
- **An alternative activity** - This curricular adaptation should be used as a last choice when the above conditions cannot be used to meet a child's needs.

Resources:

Curricular Adaptations: Accommodating the Instructional Needs of Diverse Learners in the Context of General Education. (1993). Kansas State Board of Education.

Thompson, B., Wickham, D., Wegner, J., Ault, M., Shanks, P., & Reinertson, B. (1993). Handbook for the inclusion of young children with severe disabilities. Lawrence, KS: Learner Managed Designs, Inc.

Villa, R. A. & Thousand, J.S., Ed. (1995). Creating An Inclusive School. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, VA.

Accommodating All Children in the Early Childhood Classroom. University of Kansas, Circle of Inclusion Project. 2002. English.

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