Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities

There are many practical strategies that are effective in the classroom. It is up to the classroom and special education teacher to ensure that appropriate strategies are being used in the classroom to assist individual learning styles and provide success to all students with special needs. It is recommended that a multi-modal approach be used, visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile for optimum success.

Classroom Environment

- Provide the use of a study carrel when necessary.
- Seat student in area free from distractions.
- Eliminate all unnecessary materials from student desk to reduce distractions.
- Use a checklist to help student get organized.
- Keep an extra supply of pencils, pens, books and paper in the classroom.
- You may have to allow the student frequent breaks.
- Have an agreed upon cue for student to leave the classroom.
- Reduce visual distractions in the classroom.

Time Management and Transitions

- Space short work periods with breaks.
- Provide additional time to complete assignment.
- Allow extra time for homework completion.
- Inform student with several reminders, several minutes apart, before changing from one activity to the next.
- Reduce amount of work from usual assignment.
- Provide a specific place for turning in assignments.

Presentation of Materials

- Modify expectations based on students needs.
- Break assignments into segments of shorter tasks.
- Give alternative assignments rather than long written assignments.
- Provide a model of end product.
- Provide written and verbal direction with visuals if possible.
- Break long assignments into small sequential steps, monitoring each step.
- Highlight to alert student attention to key points within the written direction of the assignment.
- Check that all homework assignments are written correctly in some kind of an agenda/homework book. Sign it and have parents sign it as well.
- Number and sequence steps in a task.
- Provide outlines, study guides, copies of overhead notes.
- Explain learning expectations to the student before beginning a lesson.
- Make sure you have the students attention before beginning a lesson.
• Allow for student to use tape recorders, computers, calculators and dictation to obtain and retain assignment success.
• Allow oral administration of test.
• Limit the number of concepts presented at one time.
• Provide incentives for beginning and completing material.

Assessment, Grading and Testing

• Provide a quiet setting for test taking, allow tests to be scribed if necessary and allowing for oral responses.
• Exempt student from district wide testing if possible.
• Divide test into small sections.
• Grade spelling separately from content.
• Allow as much time as needed to complete.
• Avoid time test.
• Change percentage of work required for passing grade.
• Permit retaking the test.
• Provide monitored breaks from test.

Behavior

• Avoid confrontations and power struggles.
• Provide an appropriate peer role model.
• Modify rules that may discriminate against student with neurological disorder.
• Develop a system or code that will let the student know when behavior is not appropriate.
• Ignore attention seeking behaviors that are not disruptive to the classroom.
• Arrange a designated safe place that student can go to.
• Develop a code of conduct for the classroom and visually display it in an appropriate place where all students can see it, review it frequently.
• Develop a behavior intervention plan that is realistic and easily applied.
• Provide immediate reinforcers and feedback.

• 4 Steps to Remember:
• 1. Reflect often on the process used to support learning disabled children - are the learning opportunities worthwhile?
• 2. Provide as many visual and auditory representations as is possible.
• 3. Activities need to be specific, manageable, attainable and measurable. Ask yourself if the learning opportunity meets the criteria.
• 4. Provide ample time for the child to seek clarification and to share his/her thoughts/responses.
• With appropriate early intervention and targeted support strategies, learning disabled children can reach their potential.
Working with Emotionally and Behaviorally Challenged Students

The following techniques can be especially effective with students exhibiting emotional and behavioral disorders:

1. **Planned ignoring**
   Behaviors that are exhibited for the purpose of seeking attention and do not spread or interfere with safety or group functioning are most effectively extinguished through planned ignoring. This technique should never be used with aggressive behaviors. The class may need to be taught to do this as well. Peer attention can be even more powerful than adult attention for some students.

2. **Signal interference**
   If a student is calm enough to respond, has a positive relationship with the teacher, and is free from uncontrollable pathological impulses, a nonverbal signal may be all that is necessary to assist him or her in regaining focus.

3. **Proximity and touch control**
   Moving closer to a student in distress or placing a hand on the shoulder can be effective in showing support in a nonthreatening way. When using this technique, refrain from pointing out inappropriate behavior. Comment positively on any move toward compliance.

4. **Interest boosting**
   Change the tempo or activity, comment on the student's work, or inquire about a known interest related to the assignment if a student shows signs of restlessness. Do this before off-task behavior occurs.

5. **Hypodermic affection**
   Express genuine affection for, or appreciation of, a student to assist the student in regaining self-control.

6. **Easing tension through humor**
   Humor can often stop undesirable behavior if it is used in a timely and positive manner. Sarcasm, cynicism, and aggression are not appropriate uses of humor.

7. **Hurdle help**
   Before a student begins to act out, assist the student with a difficult section of an assignment or task.

8. **Regrouping**
   Change the seating arrangement or the small-group assignments of students to avoid specific problems. Do this in a nonpunitive and, if possible, undetectable way.

9. **Restructuring**
   If an activity is not successful, change it as quickly as possible. It is important to always have a backup plan. Sometimes it is best to move from an interactive game to something like Bingo that requires no interaction. This can be done smoothly and nonpunitively when a group is becoming overstimulated. At other times, offering a choice might be more effective. Students could choose to cover information orally through discussion, or copy notes from an overhead, for example.

10. **Direct appeal**
    If a student or group has a positive relationship with the teacher, it is sometimes effective just to ask that a behavior stop due to the problems that it is creating. No consequence or reward is intended or implied. This is a simple, straightforward request from one person to another.
11. **Antiseptic bouncing**
   Remove a student from a distressing situation before inappropriate behaviors occur. Be careful not to inadvertently reward a student who is instigating a problem.

12. **Support from routine**
    Schedules and routines are often overlooked by adults when considering behavior management interventions. Knowing what to do and when to do it provides structure, security, and predictability in the lives of students who may not experience such support in other areas of their lives.

13. **Limiting space and tools**
    Rather than taking away items that distract or create potential harm after a student is engaged with them, keep them out of sight and reach from the beginning. This is especially important when tantrums might escalate to unnecessarily dangerous or reinforcing proportions, if too many items are available for throwing and breaking.

Excerpted from *Back Off, Cool Down, Try Again: Teaching Students How to Control Aggressive Behavior*.

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