

Care for Children With Special Needs

Indentifying a Special Need

Almost everyone has a special need at some time in their life, whether it is related to emotional, physical, or learning situations, but it doesn't necessarily mean that special help should be sought. Many of these needs can be transitory, while others may have more lasting effects. It is sometimes hard to tell if there is a difficulty of which you, as a teacher, should be taking more notice. These questions are designed to help you establish whether or not there is a special need.

- **Can you describe the problem?** Try to write down as many things as you can that describe the way a problem manifests itself, and in what situations and at what times it comes to light. If you can pinpoint details like these, you can build strategies around this information that will help you and the child in the short term, and perhaps the long term.
- **How long have you been aware of it?** If you know that it has been in the back of your mind for a while, write down some facts and discuss this with your director and parents. Have a conversation about these facts with teachers who have had this child in the past. Keep record of the situation, so that you feel you are doing something positive.
- **Has it just become more obvious?** Can you specify a particular time when it began, or when it became significantly worse? Has someone mentioned it to you, and if so what triggered the awareness? Try to identify other events that happened about the time when you became aware; do you think they could be connected? Remember that by identifying issues, you are already helping to find a solution.
- **Is the child aware of it?** Has the child commented about the situation and, if so, have they seen it as a problem or just as a feature of their everyday life? If they see it as a problem, reassure them that you have listened and will think about what should be done. If they talk about it as everyday life, then don't draw any more attention to it for now, but keep an eye on how often they refer to it and how they say it affects them when they are playing, and so on.
- **Do other children in the class have similar problem?** If other children have similar problems, which have recently come to light, it may be something specific that should be looked at in the classroom. If children

have come to you, as a teacher, with problems that seem to be related, it may be linked to subject specific areas that you will need to talk to the director about.

- **Have you tried talking to the child about it?** It can be reassuring to a child to learn that they are not the only ones having problems. Discuss this with the child, and see if they can tell you why other children cope better. Even if it is a small detail they tell you, it may give both of you a positive idea to try out.
- **Does the difficulty actually limit the progress of the child?** Can you measure this? Has there been a significant change in the child's developmental milestones or behavior?
- **Is there a difference between the child's verbal communication and written or creative work?** Try to figure out why the child can put something into words, but not express it on a piece of paper. If you can see a difference in the two, try to list the good points that help the child achieve success and progress in the past, so that you can suggest these as positive ways forward now.
- **Will it cure itself?** This probably depends on what brought it about in the first place, but there could be danger in thinking it is just a phase the child is going through because you set no time limit on when it should end. A problem once identified should be monitored, in case it flares up again or gets worse.
- **How long will it take to see improvement?** Try to have time limits in mind as a trigger for your next course of action. However, ensure that they are reasonable. For example, one week is too short for any change to be noticeable. One month is probably more realistic, while 3 months gives more time for full evaluation of the problem in your mind and any observation that needs to be taken.

In the next substantial set of tips, a number of common traits are listed and described, together with questions and suggestions about how you can begin to meet a child's needs. The child's needs are the important thing to remember; distinguishing their strengths from their weaknesses and by so doing, recognizing what specialist help can be sought, is fundamental to meeting the needs of that particular child.

Absences

- **Does the child have 'absences'?** Does the child appear to simply switch off and go into another world? These can be very short, literally a few seconds, or last longer, perhaps several minutes or so. If they are short, try to ensure, by way of verbal reinforcement for the whole class, that the child knows what they missed.
- **Do you need to do more?** If the absence lasted longer, you will need a more one-to-one situation, where the child receives the information missed on an individual verbal basis.
- **Help them back gently.** Do not force the child back from an absence by shouting at them or confronting them. Avoid any physical contact, even if you are only trying to move the body into an attentive position. Softly spoken, yet firmly repeated words, using the child's name may be effective. Possible reasons for absences might include Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder, Autism, or Diabetes.

Antagonism

- **Is the child antagonistic towards all children?** If the child seem to come into conflict, no matter where and with whom they are, then you know the problem is quite serious. In the classroom, you can usually tell if it relates to a particular combination of children, and that in the company of different children this child has natural friendships. It is possible that the child feels left out, so careful choices of whom to partner them with could change the situation.
- **Is the child antagonistic towards certain children?** You will find that there are instances where children become antagonistic towards other particular children. It is knowing when and how to distinguish between those instances that are part of the normal ebb and flow of human relationships, and the more deep-seated behavioral attitudes, that is important. As a teacher, you are probably the best judge of this. Just ask yourself if it has become an expected part of the child's behavior? If this is the case, is this more than normal classroom ebb and flow?
- **Question why the antagonism to certain children has arisen.** It can be a form of jealousy, wanting what the other child has for example, certain skills, attention from the teacher or kudos with children. Perhaps other children have made the child feel inadequate. Whichever it is, you need to

let the child know that they have strengths of their own; praise them both openly and quietly to boost their self esteem.

- **Is the child antagonistic towards those of authority?** Have you noticed that a child has a dislike of all teachers and anything which smacks of authority in and around the preschool? No matter what you say, how reasonable teachers are and how many offers are made for the child to discuss feelings, the child remains resentful of anything to do with preschool. It has become popular to describe this kind of child as disaffected.
- **Is the child antagonistic towards preschool as a whole?** In these kinds of cases, no sanction has work with the child, they seem totally turned off. The reason for such behavior may be too complex for you as individual to unravel, but you can find one area of interest that can be developed through one subject area at first and then through others, there may be a chance of change.
- **Is the child antagonistic towards certain teachers?** Such children will often be as disruptive as they can be, are unconcerned that others cannot learn as a result, and they may have friends in the classroom that act as an audience. You will need to be careful not to play to this audience. It can be best not to respond openly to challenges, to ignore the comments and speak to them quietly later.

Anti-Social Behavior

- **Does the child seem to be a real loner out of choice and actively sits away from other children, if space allows, or sits unwillingly with a partner?** All attempts to encourage the child to join in with discussion or activities have met with limited success. It may be that the child feels out of place for some reason; this can be very difficult to discuss as it could involve highly personal reasons. If the child's progress does not seem affected by this, then it may be best to leave well alone and to talk to the director.
- **Accentuate the positive.** If you feel that progress could be considerably improved, tell the pupil what they are good at and pinpoint some aspect of work that you think they will be good at. Emphasize their strengths, give a feeling of confidence, assure them that you think they can make progress, but that it may be more easily if they could share with other children. You

may get nowhere and need to work more on improving the child's self-esteem.

Attention Seeking

- Does the child try to gain attention from anyone at any time, or can you be more specific about times, places, and people. A general need for attention may be a cry for help, while a specifically related need for attention may be indicative of a skill area with which the child has difficulty.
- Be understanding, even with the most self-centered personalities. You may have no idea until you talk to them how much they have bottled up inside. Have the child talk about concerns they have and give each concern your full attention.

Identifying Children with Attention Deficit Disorder

You may find it helpful to identify children with ADD by the following questions. If you can identify about seven of these as present in the child's behavior over a period of six months, then you should speak to your director. Make note of the occasions when they displayed these characteristics and talk to the director about them.

1. Does the child fidget, squirm or seem restless?
2. Does the child move from one incomplete task to another?
3. Does the child have difficulty sitting in one place?
4. Is the child easily distracted?
5. Does the child talk excessively?
6. Does the child have difficulty in waiting for turn for attention?
7. Does the child fail to listen for instructions or what others say?
8. Does the child find it impossible to follow what needs to be done?
9. Does the child often lose equipment for a task or forgot to bring it in?
10. Does the child find it hard to play quietly and sensibly?

Tips for working with children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

1. Keep the child safe. If a child is fidgety to the extent that they become involved in dangerous actions, you will need to take appropriate action. This is often because they do not think through the consequences. Try to avoid

putting the child near any stimuli which in themselves can prove dangerous, for example, some types of windows, sockets and cables, or other children who have behavioral problems.

2. Recognize achievements. Be sure to praise the child for ignoring situations that stimulate their behavioral issues and to encourage the child to help monitor how well they did.
3. Help the child to be patient in waiting in turns. Let them know that you have noticed them, so that frustration does not cause them to lose self-control.
4. Establish supervision and discipline into the child's routine. If you impose a calm, measured approach in your teaching which is consistent, children can learn from your routine.
5. Establish with the child the notion of what constitutes completed activities if the child fails to finish work. They may not recognize when they have properly completed an activity, rather than just abandoned it. A record book or chart of their completed activities may be motivation to the child.
6. Encourage the child to ask for assistance so that they don't simply move along because they are stuck or frustrated with an activity.
7. Help them to establish the habit of playing quietly. You should start off by asking the child to play quietly for ten to fifteen minutes until they establish a routine. This will help the child notice that loud noises and action may stimulate hyperactive behavior.
8. Modify the child's activities so that they are able to work independently using their strengths.
9. Check back with the child regularly to see that they have been listening if the child seems not to listen to what is said. Call them to repeat the instructions and points at regular intervals to keep them focused. Let them know that you will be doing this, but don't stress the child by giving them unrealistic expectations.
10. Keep an organized classroom. The child with ADHD often loses classroom items, or leaves items behind, claims that others have taken them, and so on. If you provide the basics in an ordered way, this teaches them a system they can adopt elsewhere. It also creates the sense that everything is in its correct place, and promotes an ordered existence to which they can respond.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

This term applies to a range of language and communication disorders which overlap. Language development or non-verbal behaviors may be disproportionately impaired from one child to another. Remember that Autism should not be seen as a label, but as a signpost directing you to meeting the child's needs and full psychological and medical advice should be sought. Below are tips for recognizing autism.

1. Does the child have difficulty relating to people?
2. Does the child have difficulty interpreting speech and actions?
3. Does the child have difficulty in responding to events or objects in the environment?
4. Does the child perform repetitive and stereotyped actions?
5. Does the child have difficulty with speech?
6. Does the child demonstrate a strong desire to keep things the same?
7. Does the child have a good memory, particularly for role learning?
8. Does the child have good cognitive potential?
9. Does the child have a weak sense of finish?
10. Does the child have good coordination when handling objects?

Asperger's Syndrome

The child with Asperger's Syndrome may be much more difficult to recognize because they appear to have acquired speech and language structure in a normal way, but they still show signs of autism and they have difficulty in their social use of language. The following are tips to help a child with focusing on achieving success with curriculum.

1. If the child is unable to get started on written work, isolate one small aspect of work and write the title in place.
2. If the child has an obsession, or seems perpetually to be fiddling with equipment, acknowledge this.
3. Recognize when the child's mind or conversation is on a different activity.
4. Avoid insisting on verbal responses if the child refuses to speak.
5. If a child seems unable to stay seated, offer limited opportunities for movement.

6. If the child refuses to do work, even after these strategies have been tried, try another task.
7. If the child seems unwilling to respond to any attempts to help, offer a get out.
8. If the child is aware of feeling in a strange mood and of the need to work elsewhere, listen to what is said.
9. Don't ignore it if you are aware that the child is causing you, or the rest of the class, to say or do things you may feel may get out of hand.
10. Try to think and plan the words really carefully before you say something.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia, literally meaning difficulty with words, is a term that describes the symptoms rather than causes of a range of specific learning difficulties. Below are tips for recognizing dyslexia.

1. Does the child's written work regularly contain a high level of spelling mistakes?
2. Does the child have difficulty sequencing?
3. Does the child have problems remembering what has been said to them?
4. Does the child have problems remembering what they have seen?
5. Does the child appear clumsy in either fine or gross motor skills?
6. Does the child find rhyme and rhythm difficult to maintain?
7. Does a preference for left dominance occur in one or more of the sensory areas?
8. Is the child's overall level of performance lower than that would expect?
9. Does the child lack concentration and demonstrate restlessness or hyperactivity?
10. Is there a family history of similar difficulties?

Tips for Supporting Children with Language Impairment

1. Break down verbal instructions.
2. Cue your child in to each new stage of an activity
3. Encourage good personal organizational skills.
4. Enable children to help themselves.
5. Improve attention and listening skills.
6. Give good visual and contextual clues.
7. Improve written response and activities.
8. Aim for a continuous improvement in vocabulary.
9. Avoid the use of open-ended questions.

Speech disorders should not be confused with language impairment.