

Supportive Teaching Strategies

A compilation of helpful strategies for students with learning disabilities and their teachers.

Definitions & Common Difficulties of Varying Disorders

Dysphasia/Aphasia

Language disorder in children refers to problems with either:

- Getting their meaning or message across to others (expressive language disorder), or
- Understanding the message coming from others (receptive language disorder)

Some children only have an expressive language disorder. Others have a mixed receptive-expressive language disorder. This means they have symptoms of both conditions.

Children with language disorders are able to produce sounds and their speech can be understood.

Receptive language disorder

Trouble With:

- Understanding what other people have said
- Following directions that are spoken to them
- Organizing their thoughts

Expressive language disorder

Trouble with:

- Putting words together into sentences, or their sentences may be simple and short and the word order may be off
- Finding the right words when talking, and often use placeholder words such as "um"

- Vocabulary that is below the level of other children the same age
- Leaving words out of sentences when talking
- Using certain phrases over and over again, and repeat (echo) parts or all of questions
- Using tenses (past, present, future) improperly

Because of their language problems, these children may have difficulty in social settings. At times, language disorders may be part of the cause of severe behavioral problems.

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia, a form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD) is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults. It may also affect speech. DCD is a lifelong condition, formally recognized by international organizations including the World Health Organization.

School-Age Children have trouble with:

- Poor pencil grip and letter formation and slow handwriting
- Doing activities that require fine motor skills, like holding a pencil, buttoning, cutting with scissors
- Playing sports, riding a bike and other activities requiring coordination
- Sensing direction
- Speaking at a normal rate or in way that can be easily understood
- Making social connections due to speech challenges
- Phobias and obsessive behavior

Teens have trouble with:

- Speech control—volume, pitch, articulation
- Writing and typing
- Over- or under- sensitivity to light, touch, space, taste, or smells
- Personal grooming and other self-help activities
- Cooking or other household chores

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurologically-based, often familial, disorder which interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, including phonological processing, in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sometimes in arithmetic.

Trouble with:

- Understanding instructions or directions
- Repeating what has just been said in proper sequence.
- Staying on topic and getting to the point (gets bogged down in details).
- Naming people and objects.
- Speaking with precise, accurate language, proper grammar and a varied vocabulary.
- Distinguishing between words that sound similar.
- Pronouncing words correctly.
- Speaking smoothly, without much halting or use of “filler words” (like “um”).
- Rhyming.
- Understanding humor, puns and idioms.
- Reading age-appropriate content with good fluency.
- Reading aloud or silently with good understanding.
- Feeling confident and interested in reading.
- Remembering sight words and other printed words.
- Learning and remembering new vocabulary words.
- Accurately analyzing unfamiliar words (tends to guess instead).
- Reading words and letters in the correct order, seldom reversing or skipping over them.
- Understanding word problems in math.

Writing:

- Mastering spelling rules.
- Spelling the same word consistently and correctly.
- Writing letters, numbers and symbols in the correct order.

- Proofreading and correcting self-generated work.
- Expressing ideas in an organized way. (older children)
- Preparing/organizing writing assignments. (older children)
- Fully developing ideas in writing. (older children)
- Listening and taking notes at the same time.

Social-Emotional:

- Participating in a peer group and maintaining positive social status.
- Interpreting people's non-verbal cues, "body language," mood and tone of voice.
- Dealing with peer pressure, embarrassment, and expressing feelings appropriately.
- Setting realistic social goals.
- Maintaining positive self-esteem about learning and getting along with others.
- Maintaining confidence about "fitting in" with his classmates and other peers.

Other:

- Learning/remembering new skills; relies heavily on memorization.
- Remembering facts and numbers.
- Sense of direction/spatial concepts (such as left and right).
- Performing consistently on tasks from day to day.
- Applying skills from one situation to another.
- Learning new games and mastering puzzles.

Dyslexia can make it difficult for kids to:

- Understand and follow directions
- Repeat something that was just said in proper sequence
- Name people and objects
- Find the right words, such as saying "dinosaurs are distinct" instead of "dinosaurs are extinct"
- Pronounce words properly, such as saying "mawn lower" instead of "lawn mower"
- Distinguish between words that sound similar
- Learn and correctly use new words (which can lead to guessing)
- Use proper grammar

- Rhyme words
- Stay on topic
- Understand jokes, puns, sarcasm or idioms
- Speak with confidence and without overusing “filler words” (like “um” and “like”)

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a brain-based condition that makes it hard to make sense of numbers and math concepts. Some kids with dyscalculia can't grasp basic number concepts. They work hard to learn and memorize basic number facts. They may know *what* to do in math class but don't understand *why* they're doing it. In other words, they miss the logic behind it.

Trouble with:

- Understanding the one-to-one correspondence between number symbols (4) and objects (4 horses, 4 cars)
- Counting and calculating rapidly
- Learning/memorizing basic math facts (addition, subtraction)
- Learning counting strategies (such as by 2, by 10, by 100, etc.)
- Developing math problem-solving skills
- Learning multiplication tables, formulas, and rules
- Learning math vocabulary
- Making comparisons such as more than/less than
- Estimating numbers and quantities
- Measuring things
- Telling time

Visual-Spatial Sense

- Understanding spatial directions (such as left and right)
- Navigating in unfamiliar surroundings
- Accurately judging speed and distance
- Reading and interpreting charts and maps
- Mastering number knowledge (recognizing the number of dots on dice without counting)

- Accurately perceiving the passage of time

Social-Emotional

- Feeling motivated and confident about learning
- Joining peers to play games that require counting and math strategies
- Responding appropriately to teasing or criticism by peers and adults who don't understand his academic and practical struggles

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects writing abilities. It can manifest itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper.

Young Children

Trouble With:

- Tight, awkward pencil grip and body position
- Avoiding writing or drawing tasks
- Trouble forming letter shapes
- Inconsistent spacing between letters or words
- Poor understanding of uppercase and lowercase letters
- Inability to write or draw in a line or within margins
- Tiring quickly while writing

School-Age Children

Trouble With:

- Illegible handwriting
- Mixture of cursive and print writing
- Saying words out loud while writing
- Concentrating so hard on writing that comprehension of what's written is missed
- Trouble thinking of words to write
- Omitting or not finishing words in sentences

Teenagers

Trouble With:

- Trouble organizing thoughts on paper
- Trouble keeping track of thoughts already written down
- Difficulty with syntax structure and grammar

Large gap between written ideas and understanding demonstrated through speech

Auditory Processing Disorder

Auditory Processing is a natural process of taking in sound through the ear and having it travel to the language area of the brain to be interpreted. To have a breakdown in this process is called an auditory processing disorder or "delay." This deficit is present despite having normal hearing. Auditory processing is "what our brain does with what the ear hears"(Katz). When one is faced with an auditory processing deficit, his or her ears can pick up the sounds, words, etc., but his or her brain is not able to process the sounds properly-- the auditory information becomes jumbled up or confused and therefore, misunderstood.

School-Age Children

Trouble with:

- Remembering and following spoken directions;
- Remembering people's names;

- Sounding out new words;
- Seeming to ignore others when engrossed in a non-speaking activity;
- Understanding people who speak quickly;
- Finding the right words to use when talking

Teenagers

Trouble with:

- Talks louder than necessary;
- Remembering a list or sequence;
- Often needs words or sentences repeated;
- Poor ability to memorize information learned by listening;
- Interprets words too literally;
- Hearing clearly in noisy environments.
- Accommodation and modification strategies
- Find or request a quiet work space away from others.
- Request written material when you attend oral presentations.
- Ask for directions to be given one at a time, as you go through each step.
- Take notes or use a tape recorder when getting any new information, even little things

ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental disorder that causes above-normal levels of hyperactive and disruptive behaviors. People with ADHD tend to have difficulty concentrating, sitting still, paying attention, staying organized, following instructions, remembering details, and/or controlling impulses.

Trouble With:

- Concentration

- Time-limited tasks
- Starting/completing work
- Messy writing or disorganized papers
- Low self-esteem
- Peer relations
- Behavior
- Secondary emotional problems due to repeated failure and frustration

Inattention

A child with symptoms of inattention may:

- make careless mistakes or fail to pay attention to detail
- have difficulty paying attention to a task for more than a few minutes
- not seem to listen when spoken to
- not follow through on instructions or fail to finish schoolwork or chores
- have trouble organizing tasks and activities
- avoid or dislike tasks that require sustained mental effort, including homework or schoolwork
- lose or have trouble keeping track of things that she needs, such as toys, books, or school assignments
- be easily distracted
- be forgetful

Hyperactivity and impulsivity

- A child with symptoms of hyperactivity may:
- often fidget or squirm in his seat
- leave his seat when he is expected to remain seated
- run around or climb when it is inappropriate
- have trouble playing quietly
- be often "on the go" or act as if "driven by a motor"
- talk too much

A child with symptoms of impulsivity may:

- blurt out answers before the question is finished
- have trouble waiting for his turn
- interrupt others

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex condition that impacts normal brain development and affects a person's social relationships, communication, interests and behaviour.

Because ASD is a spectrum disorder, there is wide variation in how it affects each person. Individuals with ASD vary widely in their needs, skills and abilities but most have common types of characteristics including:

- difficulties with communication and social interaction
- repetitive interests and activities
- unusual attachments to objects or routines

The effects of ASD may not be visible to most people.

What does ASD in students look like:

- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Have delayed speech and language skills
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Get upset by minor changes
- Have obsessive interests
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles

- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel

Examples of social issues related to ASD:

- Does not respond to name by 12 months of age
- Avoids eye-contact
- Prefers to play alone
- Does not share interests with others
- Only interacts to achieve a desired goal
- Has flat or inappropriate facial expressions
- Does not understand personal space boundaries
- Avoids or resists physical contact
- Is not comforted by others during distress
- Has trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about own feelings

Examples of communication issues related to ASD:

- Delayed speech and language skills
- Repeats words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Reverses pronouns (e.g., says "you" instead of "I")
- Gives unrelated answers to questions
- Does not point or respond to pointing
- Uses few or no gestures (e.g., does not wave goodbye)
- Talks in a flat, robot-like, or sing-song voice
- Does not pretend in play (e.g., does not pretend to "feed" a doll)
- Does not understand jokes, sarcasm, or teasing

Other Symptoms

Some people with ASD have other symptoms. These might include:

- Hyperactivity (very active)

- Impulsivity (acting without thinking)
- Short attention span
- Aggression
- Causing self-injury
- Temper tantrums
- Unusual eating and sleeping habits
- Unusual mood or emotional reactions
- Lack of fear or more fear than expected
- Unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel

Concrete Thinkers

They tend to experience the world as a series of separate, discrete objects and events, and learn by experience working with objects, or by seeing or hearing concrete examples. Once they learn how something is done, that's the only "right" way to do it.

Concrete idea

Heavy things sink.

You breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide.

Plants get water through their roots.

Abstract idea

It will sink if its density is greater than the density of the liquid.

Gas exchange takes place between the air in the alveoli and the blood.

Water diffuses through the cell membrane of the root hair cells.

References:

<http://ncld.org/learning-disability-resources/>

<http://actg.org/programs-services/auditory/what-auditory-processing>

http://www.projectlearn.net.org/tutorials/concrete_vs_abstract_thinking.html

<http://www.nytimes.com/health/guides/disease/mixed-receptive-expressive-language-disorder/overview.html>

Classroom strategies for helping students cope.

Strategy	To Improve...	Instructions	Evaluation	Ideal for...
DOT Technique	Focus Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instruct student to read & put a dot where they first become off task. - Measure the distance between starting point & where they went of task (ex. 3 cm). -Indicate on text every 3 cm for students to check "Am I on task?" - Student will need copy of text to be able to write on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in distance between dots. - Focus has increase in unrelated areas. -Student has improved his or her ability to self-regulate. 	<p>Dyslexia</p> <p>ADD</p> <p>ADHD</p>
Double Entry Diary	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide student with white space behind text to write. - View example online at adlit.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehension increase on assessments. - Students on the spectrum are able to remain within their limits. 	<p>Dyslexia</p> <p>Dysphasia</p> <p>Spectrum Disorders</p>
Highlighting	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colour coding to identify different details or difficulties: Blue for unknown words, yellow for important dates, etc... (Also useful in math for identifying keywords in word problems). - Student creates personal legend to identify what colour is used for what. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Comprehension increase on assessments. -Appropriate details are highlighted. 	All students
Reading with your index finger or a ruler.	Focus Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Direct students to use their finger or a tool, such as a ruler, to follow along while reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reading task is completed within appropriate amount of time. -Reading speed and 	<p>Dyslexia</p> <p>Dysphasia (Aphasia)</p> <p>ADD</p>

			comprehension have improved.	ADHD
Audio Files	Comprehension Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student can listen to text while reading. - Have to create your own audio files for math evaluations. - Student can read out loud to themselves as well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehension of text has improved. - Assignment completion. -Assignment submission. 	<p>Dyslexia</p> <p>Dysgraphia</p>
Reset Button	Focus Self-Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place a dot (sticker) on the corner of the student's desk. - Sticker is used as a visual reminder to get back on task. - Teacher can tap the "button" as a discrete reminder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student is able to refocus and self-monitor in all situations. - Assignment completion. -Assignment submission. 	<p>ADD</p> <p>ADHD</p>
Two Desks	Self-Regulation Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The desks are placed at opposite ends of the classroom for student to walk between & do their work at each station. - Paper & pencil is placed at each desk so student does not have to transfer all tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student is able to remain in class for the duration of the class time. - Duration of time on task has increased. 	<p>ADD</p> <p>ADHD</p>
Doodle Pad	Focus	-A pad of scrap paper is taped to the desk to draw on, and rip as they go.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase of focus. -Duration of time on task increased. -Assignment completion. Assignment submission. 	<p>ADD</p> <p>ADHD</p>
Music Stand	Focus Movement	-Student will stand while working within a zone identified by masking tape or mat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student completes given task. -Student remains on task for longer period of 	ADHD

			time.	
Music	Focus	-Allow student to listen to music through headphones while working independently.	- Student is able to remain on task for longer periods of time. -Completion of given task. -Student is less of a distraction to others.	ADD ADHD
Rubber Tube	Focus Movement	- Place a large rubber band or tube around the two front legs of student's chair. - Instruct student to use rubber band to bounce legs on while working. - Encourage at-seat movement, and decrease full classroom movement.	-Student is able to sit still for longer periods of time. -Less classroom disruptions. -Increase in work completion.	ADD ADHD
Exercise Ball	Focus Posture	-Replace students chair with a large exercise ball.	-Student is able to sit still for longer period of time. -Less classroom disruptions. -Increase in work completion.	ADD ADHD
Tissue	Focus	-Provide student with a tissue to crumple and play with in hand. -Tissue replaces "fun" fidget toy that can distract other students or student using it. -Tissue makes no noise.	-Student remains on task for longer periods of time. -Quality of work increased.	ADD ADHD
Planning Strategies for Teachers to Help Students Cope				
Strategy	To improve...	Instructions	Evaluation	Ideal for...
Chunk Material	Focus	-Give student one question or topic	-Assignments are being	ADD

	Work Completion	per sheet at a time to allow student to focus on one task at a time. -Once student completes and submits the task, provide them with the next question or assignment.	completed. -Student is showing their work (evidence of knowledge through steps).	ADHD Spectrum disorders Dysphasia (Aphasia)
Limit Word Use	Comprehension	-Highlight important details to model how to isolate the expected work.	-Assignments are being completed. -Student is showing their work (evidence of knowledge through steps).	Dyslexia Spectrum disorders
Worksheet Format	Focus Work Completion	- Landscape worksheet to provide full worksheet on half the size of paper. - May have to use a smaller font. -	-Worksheets are being completed. -Students are no longer complaining about the amount of work to do.	Motivating Practice for all students.
Worksheet Font	Focus Work Completion	-Create student worksheets and handouts using specific font available at http://opendyslexic.org/	-Student is able to read more easily. -Student completes assignments.	Dyslexia
Workspace	Work Completion Organization	-Photocopy graph paper on to actual question area where answer is needed to provide proper spacing and guide for steps.	-Worksheets are being completed. -Full work/steps are being shown on evaluations. -Students feel there is enough space to complete the given question.	Spectrum disorders.

Physical Activity	Focus	-Have students stand up and small physical activity such as brain gym or full body rock, paper scissors.	-Class participation and focus have improved. -Test results have improved, supporting positive information processing.	ADD ADHD
Buddy System	Organization	-Match your student up with an organized student for them to check in with regarding assignments, tests and binder/locker cleanliness.	-Assignments are submitted on time. -Tests are prepared for. -Binders and locker are organized.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Boarders	Focus Guidance	-Place a coloured mat on student's desk or tape a boarder using masking tape. (Creating boarders on handouts where workspace is available is also helpful).	-Quality of work has improved. -Completion of work.	Spectrum Disorders
Puzzle/Game	Focus	-Place a puzzle or educational game (iPad can be used as well is available), in a corner of your room for students to work on once a task has been completed. -Students who need to work in short periods of time can use this activity center as a five minute break area.	-Quality of work has improved. -Completion of work. -Focus on work while working has improved. -Less class	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Classroom Organization: Testing & Time Management Strategies				
Question Completion	Work Completion Confidence	-Encourage student to review all questions while completing the test from back to front to ensure answering of all higher evaluated questions.	-Long answers are answered in full. -Student does not leave final questions blank.	Any student with concentration issues.

Section by Section	Work Completion Confidence	-Encourage student to complete one question from each section, then return to the first section and repeat until test is complete.	-Student completes test. -Student is more confident in responses.	Any student with concentration issues.
Stations	Time Management	-Break up test questions into stations around your classroom. -Allocate an appropriate amount of time for each question. -Have students rotate between stations if timing is equivalent for each question. -If timing is different, have students complete one question at a time at their desk, handing out one question at a time.	-Student completes test. -Student does not rush answer. -Student answers in full.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Special Exam Conditions	Work Completion Preparation Confidence	-Adhere to and Encourage all students who are entitled to special exam condition to use them for all forms of evaluation.	-Students are comfortable with special exam condition software(s) -Students are completing evaluations in full.	All Students with special exam conditions.
Binders	Organization Preparation Work Completion Assignment Submission	-Create a place in your classroom where students can/must keep their subject binder and tools.	-Student is prepared for class with all materials. -Student submits assignments on time. -Student does not lose materials.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Extra Supplies	Work Completion	-Have extra supplies for the material needed to complete the give task available for students who may not	-Students complete assignments.	ADD ADHD

		have their own.		Spectrum Disorders
Homework File	Organization Work Completion	-Have all students create and keep a homework file/folder. -Instruct students to place homework handouts inside this folder to ensure it is brought home to complete.	-Student completes homework.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Daily Task Manager	Organization Work Completion	-On a classroom board or wall have a section for an outline of your daily task. -Include lesson outline, and class expectations.	-Student is on task. -Student is aware of what it is he or she should be working on. -Student knows why this task is important and helpful.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders
Long-term Calendar	Organization Work Completion	-Create an in-class or online calendar (google calendar). -Schedule all upcoming assignments and evaluations for students to view.	-Student is aware of upcoming assignments/tests. -Students are prepared for tests.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders.
Agenda Time	Organization Work Completion	-Structure the last 5 minutes of your class time to be used for writing down homework in the agenda. -Circulate the class to ensure students have written down the homework and that it is accurate.	-Student completes homework. -Student is aware of upcoming assignments/tests.	ADD ADHD Spectrum Disorders