

# REALIZE *more*

An online information, sharing and community resource for individuals with disabilities, parents, carers and professionals

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## Supporting students with learning disabilities in the classroom

### A guide to supporting students with learning disabilities in your classroom

#### Learning disabilities v learning difficulties

A learning disability and learning difficulty are not the same. A learning difficulty does not affect general intelligence, whereas a learning disability is linked to an overall cognitive impairment.

For more information on how to support a child with learning difficulties, please click on the link to a specific learning difficulty below:

- [Dyslexia](#)
- [Dyscalculia](#)
- [Dyspraxia](#)
- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\)](#)

#### Strategies for the classroom

- **Praise and reward**

Focus on praising effort rather than performance. Students with learning disabilities may not always achieve high marks but may have given considerable effort. Consider marking work not based on grades and percentages but on how much effort the child has given to the task, the methods they used to undertake the work.

- **Mistakes are OK and part of learning**

Students with learning disabilities may feel very sensitive to their achievement. A good rule for the whole class is to remind them that mistakes are OK, everyone makes mistakes and they are part of learning. By enabling students to embrace their mistakes they can positively learn from them and undertake focused study on that area, and is less likely to attribute them to personal failings which can cause low self-esteem, anxiety, fear/ dislike of school potentially resulting in mental health issues, disengagement in school, truancy and withdrawal from school.

- **Motivation**

Try to use a student's interests when teaching a subject e.g. if you are supporting children to learn to count and the child has an interest in dinosaurs use pictures or toy dinosaurs.

Consider using reward schemes such as stickers, reward charts. Ensure that you are not singling out students with learning disabilities. Use the same reward system for all children in the class.

Break up the school day with fun activities between the activities that require greater concentration and may be more difficult.

- **Accessibility**

Students with learning disabilities tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people. Accessibility is key from the classroom environment to how teaching is delivered.

- **Accessible Communication**

Communicate clearly and concisely. Avoid jargon.

[Click here to find out more about: Strategies for Positive Two-way Communication with students with Learning disabilities .](#)

- **Accessible Information**

Verbal and Written communication may prove challenging and time consuming for students with learning disabilities. No student with a learning disability is the same so it is important to assess their level of understanding, how they like information

presented and how they like to communicate as part of your initial meetings with the student and their family/ carers. The way you communicate, and present information will depend on their preference and severity of their learning disability.

Many students with mild learning disabilities might opt for "Easy Read" text with occasional supporting pictures whereas a student with a severe learning disability may need you to use symbols, pictures or objects to represent information. PECS is a good, universal pictorial tool that can support students with learning disabilities.

It is most likely that your student will benefit from an Individualised Education Plan to identify their learning needs and strategies to support their development. If your student also has health and Care needs, they may also require a Health and Care Plan. The Care and Health Plans should be developed alongside the student's doctor.

[Click here to find out more about Individualised Education Plans .](#)

- **Make learning fun!**

*Creative teaching*

Avoid teaching just using the blackboard or worksheets, this is not an accessible way of teaching for students with learning disabilities and will not be of most benefit to your other students.

Use topics/ themes: Consider parcelling up your learning for the term as a topic - you can teach all subjects through a theme.

Here's an example: "The Arctic"

- You could set the children the challenge of planning an arctic expedition:
  - Maths - The children have to work out the distance between Belize and the Arctic, use measurement to design a sledge, work out rations for a trip e.g. how many packets of rice etc, you could also look at temperatures
  - Science – Looking at solids, liquids and gases. What causes liquid to freeze? What temperature does water boil? You can make this simple for pre-schoolers through to looking at particle physics with High Schoolers. You could look at the wildlife that lives in the arctic
  - Geography - Where is the arctic? What is the environment like? Who lives in the Arctic?
  - Art – You could create an arctic scene, transform your classroom into the Arctic by making an igloo out of plastic bottles (you roughly need 400- these could be collected by families a couple of terms before), make clay models of animals.

Visit Pinterest for activity ideas on a range of themes.

*Multi-sensory teaching*

All students will benefit from a variety of teaching methods, especially children who respond well to visual aids. Consider how you might integrate dance, music, art, cooking and movement.

Here's a few ideas for facilitating the Arctic project example given above:

- Music and movement - Play the children Arctic music- wind whistling, snowstorms, the sound of arctic animals- Ask them to listen carefully at first and tell you what they hear. Then, encourage the children to move around the room like the wind, a snowstorm, Arctic animals. You could make up a story and ask the children to act it out as you read e.g. Far away, the Arctic wind was blowing, a small Arctic fox opened his eyes and crawled out of his burrow....". You could give the children instruments to play along at certain points in the story.
- Cooking – Support the children to find out what food people eat in the Arctic e.g. stew. Integrate maths and literacy skills to use a recipe, shop for ingredients and prepare an Arctic dish.

- **Allow time**

Patience is key! It may take a student with a learning disability longer to complete a task. Try to create a relaxed, calm environment where they do not feel pressured or are made to feel different to the other children in the class.

Consider the complexity of tasks. You may need to break the task into manageable steps. Give praise and encouragement as your student achieves each milestone.

Discuss the student's path to success and have the child identify several strategies that he or she may be able to benefit from.

- **Parent/ Carer relationships**

It is essential to build and maintain good working relationships with the student's family/ carers to enable the student to achieve their potential. Only by working together, with support from home and school will the student flourish.

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