**Characteristics and Instructional Strategies**

**for Specific Disabilities**

Educational disabilities include: Autism, Deaf-blindness, Deafness, Developmental delay, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Loss, Cognitive Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other heath impairment, Specific learning disability, Speech or language impairment, Traumatic brain injury, or Visual impairment. This is a general list of characteristics and instructional strategies of the most common disabilities that may or may not apply to all students with each disability. Please seek input from the teachers you work with to discover additional information that will assist you in meeting the unique needs of our students.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)**

**Categorized as Other Health Impairment**

ADHD is a neurobiological disorder. Typically, children with ADHD have developmentally inappropriate behavior, including hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity and occur in several settings such as home, school and extra-curricular activities.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Hyperactivity

• Distractibility

• Inattention

• Impulsivity

• Social skills deficit

• Difficulty Focusing

• Poor organization of materials and thoughts

• Fails to give attention to detail and makes careless mistakes

• Varied perception of time (difficult tasks may seem like they take a very long time, preferred tasks

maintain their attention for longer periods of time)

• Difficulty following through with directions and completing assignments

• Difficulty with problem solving

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Minimize distractions

• Provide uncluttered workspace

• Provide structure and routine

• Provide organizational tools and strategies

• Provide visual and graphic organizers

• Break tasks into smaller segments

• Highlight important ideas

• Color coding

• Use of timers and providing reminders of remaining time to complete an assignment

• Modified instruction

• Set behavioral expectations

• Provide structured breaks between assignments

• Allow for movement opportunities

• Active learning

• Use of fidget objects and wiggle cushions

**Autism**

A developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Verbal and nonverbal communication deficit

• Narrow interests with stereotyped behaviors

• Resistance to environmental change and daily routines

• Engage in repetitive activities (repeating a phrase/story or performing same motor task over and

over)

• Literal and concrete thinker

• Unusual responses to sensory experiences

• Varying levels of intelligence and ability

• Difficulty with social interaction skills

• Motor difficulties

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Obtain the student’s attention before giving a direction or talking with the student.

• Provide structure, consistency and routine.

• Allow enough time for the student to respond.

• Reduce amount of talking to the student.

• Provide choices for students when possible.

• Use visual supports (objects, photos, picture, symbols, gestures, or sign language) to increase

understanding.

• Prepare students for transitions and changes in schedule or routine (First, then chart,

use of a picture schedule, visual timer).

• Avoid using idioms, words with double meanings and sarcasm.

• Allow the use of a “fidget” or sensory object when appropriate.

**Developmental Delay**

A student age three through nine assessed and evaluated as having a disability or delay in development that needs special education and related services.

Since the characteristics and instructional strategies for individual students will vary, consult the teacher for recommendations for each student.

**Emotional Disability (ED)**

Characterized by one or more of the following: inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression or a tendency to develop physical symptoms of fear associated with personal or school problems.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings

• Uncooperative

• Withdrawn

• Low self esteem

• Difficulty with social skills and interacting with peers and adults

• Resists authority

• Poor coping skills

• Poor social skills

• Poor self control

• Aggressive behavior

• Anxiety

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Set clear rules, boundaries and expectations

• Learn what might trigger a student’s behavior and work with the student to prevent or deescalate

the behaviors.

• Avoid power struggles.

• Provide choices of two things you want them to do.

• Encourage the use of self control strategies (deep breathing, counting backwards)

• Consistently follow the behavior plan or behavior strategies recommended by the teacher.

• NEVER use physical restraint unless you have completed Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training.

• Refrain from “rehashing past behavior”.

**Deaf/Hard of Hearing Impairment**

Students have a wide range of hearing loss. The term deaf implies that a person has a very severe hearing loss and relies primarily on lip reading or sign language for communication.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Language and speech delay

• Different voice characteristics

• May misunderstand information presented

• Difficulty understanding concepts that are not concrete

• Takes things literally

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Use of visuals

• Gain the student’s attention before speaking

• Face the student when talking

• Speak clearly and at a normal pace

• Be sure the student is seated close to the speaker

• Allow time for the student to respond

**Cognitive Disability**

A significant overall delay in thinking, communicating and performing daily life skills.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Require more time and repetition to learn things

• May have difficulties with fine and gross motor

• Delayed academic skills

• May have delayed speech and language

• Adult assistance or supervision for activities of daily living (toileting, dressing, feeding)

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Multi-sensory approach (sandpaper letters, gross motor activities, hear it and say it and write it)

• Use of visual supports (objects, photos, picture, symbols, gestures, or sign language) to increase understanding

• Scaffolding (Identify what they know and build on previously learned skills)

• Provide structure and establish routines

• Modeling (showing them how to complete a task, providing model of completed task)

• Allow extra time for response

• Break tasks/assignments into down into smaller segments

• Need assistance or supervision for activities of daily living

• Use redirection and frequent positive reinforcement

• Modified and/or alternative curriculum Orthopedic Impairment Physical (motor) difficulties in mobility, writing, and or sitting.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Limited movement and functioning of arms and/or legs

• Involuntary movements (cannot control)

• May need assistance with activities of daily living (toileting, dressing, feeding)

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Remove or accommodate barriers for student

• Allow students to be as independent as possible

• Speak to the person on their level (sit down if they are in a wheelchair)

• Allow enough time for student to respond, complete activities

• Ensure proper positioning for access and comfort prior to instruction

**Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**

A disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself ability to listen, think, speak, read, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Have difficulty in one or more academic area, yet may be strong in other areas

• Difficulty processing information either visually or through spoken language

• Average or above average intelligence

• Distractible

• Easily frustrated

• Inattention

• Social skills deficit

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Use the student’s strengths to work on difficult areas

• Chunking (Breaking assignments down into smaller, more manageable tasks)

• Allow extra time for response

• Graphic organizers

• Visual organizers

• Use of strategies (Example: COPS Capitalization, Overall Appearance, Punctuation, Spelling)

• Multi-sensory approach (sandpaper letters, gross motor activities, hear it and say it and write it)

• Scaffolding (Identify what they know and build on previously learned skills)

• Color coding

• Use of timers and providing reminders of remaining time to complete an assignment

• Modified instruction

**Speech/Language Impairment**

Difficulty in understanding or expressing language, stuttering or unusual voice characteristics.

General Characteristics May Include:

• Delay in language concepts (sentence length, vocabulary)

• Poor pragmatic (social language)

• Difficulty understanding when speaking Instructional Strategies:

• Model good speech and language

• Allow students to communicate as independently as possible utilizing their mode(s) of

communication (verbal, sign language, picture symbols, augmentative communication device/voice

output device, computer)

• Ask student to repeat if you did not understand or express in a different way (show me, point to)

• Allow enough time for student to respond

• Use visual supports (objects, photos, picture, symbols, gestures, or sign language) to increase understanding

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

An injury to the brain that adversely affects a student’s educational performance.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• Impairment may be in one or more of the following areas: cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, motor abilities, processing and speech

• May need assistance with activities of daily living (toileting, dressing, feeding)

• Anxiety of coping with the loss of skills prior to injury

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Use simple and concrete language, but maintain high expectations

• Repetition of skills

• Modeling

• Break tasks/assignments into down into smaller segments

**Visual Impairment**

Impairment in vision which, even with correction, adversely affects a student’s educational performance. Visual Impairment includes partial sight and blindness.

**General Characteristics May Include:**

• May tire easily visually

• Sensitivity to light

• May have difficulty finding materials

• Difficulty with mobility

• Poor depth perception

**Instructional Strategies:**

• Close proximity to teacher and instructional materials

• Enlarged print

• Multi sensory (hearing, touch)

• Assistive Tech devices (talking calculators, dome magnifier)

• Light boards

• Organized workspace

• Reduce glare

• Use pens or markers vs. pencil

• Slant boards

• Contrast of color/use of contrasting backgrounds

