

**Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities**

# **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

## **Introduction:**

The term inclusion means different things to different people. Some interpret inclusion to simply mean access to the same curricular activities as their typically developing peers while others interpret inclusion to mean that children with special needs not only have access to curriculum but are also meaningfully and physically integrated into the community. These discrepancies have been debated in the literature and in practice for years. Teachers’ beliefs about educating children with disabilities, and their beliefs about inclusion, may affect how inclusion should be implemented and how children with special needs are educated (17) & (22).

In an inclusive classroom, teachers use inclusive instructional strategies such as  [Universal Design for Learning](http://www.udlcenter.org/) (UDL), [lesson accommodations,](http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/search?q=accommodations) and [curriculum modifications](http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/search?q=modifications) to help all students access and learn class material. It is to the benefit of all that more classroom become inclusive and provide educational opportunities to all students (23). Inclusion promotes belonging and participating in a diverse society (extending to families, communities, and neighbourhoods in which children grow up). Inclusion can benefit children with and without disabilities (25).

As teachers, we can help create inclusive classrooms by demystifying what inclusion is and why it is important, educating ourselves about best practices, listening to our students and obtaining their feedback, demonstrating and teaching empathy, and creating an environment of respect for all.

## **Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the module, the reader will gain and understanding of:

* What inclusion is and why it is important
* What early intervention is and why it is important
* What Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is and how to accommodate students with disabilities and modify the curriculum so they can have full access to learning materials
* How to use checklists to guide preparation of accessible learning materials for students with disabilities

## **Glossary:**

Accessible: means a person with a disability can acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability.

Accommodation: used to describe an alteration of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: a disorder of which symptoms include hyperactivity, impulsivity, organization, and/or inattention that are noticeably greater than expected for the student’s age or developmental level.

Dyscalculia: is a learning disability that affects the student’s ability to acquire arithmetical skills. Dyscalculic learners may have difficulty understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers, and have problems learning number facts and procedures.

Dysgraphia: is a neurological condition and learning difference in which someone has difficulty with writing for their age level. This can range from issues with the physical act of writing to issues with translating thoughts into written words

Dyslexia: is a term for a learning difference in which someone has difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols.

Early Intervention: is the term used for services and support that help babies and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

Inclusion: the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups.

Modification: used to describe a change in the curriculum for a student with a disability

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): an approach to teaching and learning that gives all students equal opportunity to succeed.

## **Case Studies:**

As we move through this module, think about these students below, or a student you have in your class. Think about how they would benefit from an inclusion classroom and what you can do as their teacher to structure the class so they can fully participate in all activities:

Devon is in the fourth grade and is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, which is a physical disability. He uses a manual wheelchair and can move around independently. However, he becomes very fatigued later in the day and especially late in the afternoon.

Alexandra is in sixth grade and has always had difficulty organizing her thoughts for writing assignments, as well as organization overall. She frequently forgets materials or where she placed her belongings. She has a hard time writing out information in a logical way, though she is able to verbally relay information in great detail.

Jared is a friendly 3-year-old student with a cognitive disability. He enjoys participating in all play activities, particularly music. He interacts with his family members and preschool teachers by smiling, laughing, and pointing to objects, but he does not speak in words.

Think about these students as we progress through the module. What are your concerns as their teacher? What resources or education do you need to help you create an inclusive learning environment for these students? Write down your thoughts on a piece of paper.

## **Why is inclusion important?**

School environments that promote inclusion are more effective for all students and provide greater opportunities for all learners to participate and excel. Inclusion provides opportunities for students with disabilities to be exposed to the same content as their peers, and it is a chance for students without disabilities to experience how students with disabilities complete their academic tasks in the classroom. It is a place for tolerance and empathy to be practiced and learned. All these concepts have an impact on societal attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Evidence suggests that inclusion is the optimal learning environment for most children with disabilities. Research on academic outcomes shows that children with disabilities perform as well in inclusive settings as they do in segregated settings on standardized developmental measures (16), (19) & (18), and studies on social outcomes show that children with disabilities have more positive social interactions with peers in inclusive settings(7). Furthermore, studies that investigated behavioral outcomes found that the behavior of children with disabilities was positively affected by their typically developing peers (12); specifically, children with disabilities learned new skills by seeing them demonstrated by other children. Most important for preschool inclusion, children developed a greater sense of belonging when they participated in early educational settings where all children are respected and valued (19).

Universal Design for Learning is a framework which promotes the success of an inclusive classroom. The main premise is that since all students learn and think differently, classrooms should offer flexibility in the way students access information and demonstrate what they know. The goal of UDL is reduce or eliminate barriers to learning (23).

There are three main guidelines for promoting UDL: provide multiple means of engagement and help students understand why they are learning the content, provide multiple means of representation and help students understand what they are learning, and provide multiple means of expression and help student demonstrate what they learned (23).

## **Early identification and intervention**

When a child does not achieve developmental milestones such as language and motor skills in comparison to other children of the same age range, the child could be experiencing a developmental delay. For children with a developmental delay, it is necessary to find out the cause of the delay and to provide targeted support for the child and their family. Targeted support and interventions can be provided to the child and have a significant impact on the child’s ability to overcome challenges and increase success throughout their school years and later in life. Early intervention is one way to help support students with disabilities in the beginning of their life, and subsequently throughout their academic career

Early intervention services are special services for children at risk for or with developmental delays. Intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided as soon as a problem is suspected, rather than waiting for the child to “catch up” on their own, which typically doesn’t work. Providing support to the child can also reduce frustration, which can manifest in difficult behaviours. Early intervention services can change a child’s developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities (4).

For some children who do not need early intervention support, but experience difficulty when they transition to school, primary school teachers they are ones most likely to identify these children. Sometimes children exhibit characteristics of a developmental delay or disability in the context of the classroom, but do not exhibit these same characteristics at home, so the child’s family might not be aware. Hence, it is important that the primary school classroom teacher identify delayed behaviors and inform the parents to help create and implement a plan to provide structured support.

## **Observable characteristics for students who may have a developmental delay or disability:**

Now that we have discussed what early intervention is and why it is important, we will discuss some characteristics a primary school classroom teacher might observe to determine if a student may have a developmental delay or disability in various areas:

### **Visual Impairment: (5)**

The following are characteristics of a child who might have a visual impairment:

* The student views objects closely to their face.
* The student positions themselves near the light source like window, door, lamp etc.
* They find it difficult to judge the distances of objects relative to their body accurately.
* They struggle with depth perception
* They are not able to see objects at a distance, like the black board or white board
* They have trouble reading and writing.
* They are not able to focus on objects or follow moving objects
* They may squint often and rub their eyes
* Their eyes may be watering
* They may be sensitive to light

### **Hearing Impairment: (14)**

As there may not be much distraction at home, the child’s parents might not be able to identify a mild hearing impairment. However, in a classroom situation, where the noise level is substantially increased, a child may not respond when being called by the teachers or they may have difficulty following verbal instructions. The following are characteristics of a child who might have a hearing impairment:

* Difficulty following verbal directions
* Difficulty with oral expression
* Difficulty with social/emotional or interpersonal skills
* A degree of language delay
* Often follows peers and rarely leads
* Will usually exhibit some form of articulation difficulty
* Can become easily frustrated if they cannot be understood by their teachers or peers

### **Learning Disabilities: (15)**

Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia are typically exhibited when children start attending school. The following are characteristics of a child who might have a learning disability:

* The student has a short attention span
* The student has a poor memory and difficulty recalling information
* The student has difficulty following instructions
* The student has an inability to discriminate between letters, numerals or sounds and poor reading ability
* The student has poor letter formation and spacing
* The student has poor eye-hand coordination
* The student has difficulty recognizing numbers, counting, sequencing, and recognizing patterns, loses track when counting, and need to use visual aids like their fingers to help them count

The video below provides a brief explanation of what Learning Disabilities are and why it is important for teachers to recognize their characteristics:



### **Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD): (2)**

ADHD is a disorder of which symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity, organization, and/or inattention are noticeably greater than expected for their age or developmental level. A student might have ADHD if they exhibit the following characteristics:

* Being unable to sit still, especially in calm or quiet surroundings
* Constantly fidgeting
* Being unable to concentrate on tasks
* Excessive physical movement
* Excessive talking
* Being unable to wait for their turn
* Being impulsive
* Interrupting conversation

# **Cognitive Impairment or Delay: (9) & (7)**

The category of cognitive impairment is very broad and can pertain to a student who has difficulty with a wide range of tasks such as learning, remembering, and making decisions. Signs of a cognitive impairment or delay may include these characteristics:

* Significantly delayed motor skills, such as walking later than other children
* Delayed speech or difficulty speaking
* Difficulty learning at grade/age-appropriate level
* Poor memory
* Inability to understand consequences of actions
* Poor problem-solving skills
* Poor understanding of social rules

If a student is found to have observed characteristics in any category, a plan should be developed to provide specific support to the student in school and at home. Students identified with a development delay or disability may also benefit from accommodation or modifications to the curriculum. This is discussed in detail in the sections below:

## **Accommodations in the area of academics: (1)**

Providing accommodations to a student with a disability does not mean lowering expectations. An accommodation does not alter what is taught by the teacher, but rather provides support specific to the student’s needs. An accommodation is an alteration of environment, format of the learning materials, or use of specialized equipment that allows a student with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks. Accommodation allows students with disabilities to pursue a regular course of study with support (IRIS Peabody Center, n.d.). Examples of accommodations include:

* sign language interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
* computer text-to-speech computer-based systems for students with learning disabilities such as Dyslexia.
* extended time on tasks for students with fine motor impairments, visual impairments, or learning disabilities.
* large-print books and tactile worksheets for students with visual impairments.
* trackballs and alternative keyboards for students with a physical impairment who cannot operate standard mice and keyboards.
* Provide teacher written notes or assign a student notetaker to students who have a hearing impairment to make sure they do not miss critical information in class.

Frequently, teachers will enhance curriculum with additions of instructional strategies. A curriculum enhancement is something that is used with existing general curriculum. Frequently curriculum enhancements are created to evaluate and teach adequate background knowledge in preparation for a new task. Additionally, teachers may incorporate a variety of instructional materials and procedures to meet students’ needs, including the use of co-teaching and/or instructional collaboration. Curriculum enhancements is different than curriculum modification, which is discussed in the next section.

## **Modifications in areas of academics: (1)**

Modification is a way to support students with disabilities that goes beyond the level of support that an accommodation provides.  A modification to the curriculum is changing what the student is expected to learn, not the way it is presented. A curriculum modification is a change to a classroom task, activity, or materials to maximize a student's participation. Modifications involve combinations of altered content, altered conceptual difficulty, educational goals, and instructional method. Again, providing modifications does not mean that the teacher should expect less of the student with a disability. It means that the teacher is altering or modifying what the student with the disability is learning based on their needs (Rockets, 2019). Below are some examples and illustrations of this concept:

* **Flexibility with the curriculum** – One example of curriculum modification is that the number of assignments might be reduced or the questions may be simplified for a student with a disability.
  + If the students in a 3rd grade classroom are learning double digit multiplication via 3 different methods, perhaps a modification for the student with a disability would be to teach and hold them responsible for learning only single digit multiplication via 1 method.
  + For a writing lesson, students in a 2nd grade classroom are engaging in a writing assignment individually, while students with learning disabilities may work on their assignment in a small group with teacher support. The students with a disability may only write one paragraph, but they are required to and will be graded on proper use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
  + While the teacher in a 4th grade classroom requires students to compose a writing sample using five new vocabulary words from the lesson, the students with a disability may select three of the five new words from the lesson and make appropriate use of them in the context of their work.
* **A fair evaluation system** – Students with disabilities may not be able to perform the same way as their typically developing peers, and hence a fair means of evaluation system should be implemented. This topic is discussed in depth in the module, “Inclusive Evaluations and Examinations”. Some examples are listed below:
  + A student with physical disability may not be able to draw a diagram using a standard pencil and paper. Therefore, an alternative assignment should be given to them to assess their knowledge of the concept being evaluated, such as orally relaying the information.
  + Provide students with disabilities examinations with multiple choice options, rather than written out essay responses.
  + Break down the task into more manageable parts rather than asking a student with a disability to do all the steps at one time.

### **Successful Tips for Teachers for Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the Classroom: (8)**

1. **Assume competence and treat students with special needs the same way as other students:**

Students with disabilities should be encouraged to participate in all the tasks and activities that the rest of the students participate in. Students with disabilities should be encouraged to participate in story narration, poem recitation, arts and craft activities, and sports with modifications as necessary. It is advised that teachers are prepared with materials for these activities in advance. Students with disabilities should be made a part of group projects and activities, and their ideas and suggestions should be considered. This encourages a sense of belongingness to the class, and they will not feel left out. Some additional points to keep in mind:

* Welcome everyone.
* Avoid stereotyping.
* Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any student.
* Make interactions accessible to all participants.
* Ensure physical access to all facilities.
* Set high expectations and provide supports to help them achieve them

1. **Ask for help and seek expert assistance:**

Teachers aren’t expected to know all the answers and may benefit from seeking assistance from other faculty or referring to organizations who have specific skills to work with various students with disabilities. For example:

* Organizations that support students with communication skills, speech, and language therapy for students with speech and hearing impairment and developmental delays
* Assistive technology specialists for students with various types of disabilities
* Mobility and orientation instructors for students with visual impairments
* Physiotherapy for students with physical disabilities.
* Sign language for students who have a hearing impairment, and basic signs for those who interact with the student who has a hearing impairment

1. **Create lesson plans with inclusion in mind:**

When creating lesson plans and activities, design them with all your students in mind. Some ideas to consider are:

* Arrange instructional spaces to maximize inclusion and comfort.
* Make content relevant.
* Provide multiple ways to gain and demonstrate knowledge, rather than only one.
* Use large visual and tactile aids to demonstrate concepts.

Students with disabilities benefit from various accommodations and modifications based on their needs. In the section below, we will discuss effective accommodations for specific types of disabilities:

## **Effective Accommodations for Students with Visual Impairments: (5)**

Effective accommodations for students who are Blind or have visual impairments include audio books, alternative print formats, magnification devices, bright incandescent lighting, raised lettering, verbal cues for visual information, tactile diagrams and images, adaptive computer equipment such as screen readers, the use of scribes and human readers for exams, and time extensions for assignments and exams.

They also benefit from orientation and mobility skills for safe movement in and around the school building.

## **Effective Accommodations for Students with Physical Impairments: (3)**

The phrase physical disability is used to describe a wide range of physical limitations and diagnoses, the most common of which would be someone who uses a wheelchair or other mobility device. Effective accommodations for students with physical impairments in the classroom include:

* Relocating a class or lab to an accessible building/space
* Use of dictation technology instead of typing information into a word processor
* Audio recorder for class notes or human notetaking assistance
* Accessible seating or table in the classroom
* Scribe for essay exams
* Additional time for completing tasks and exams

## **Effective Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities: (11)**

A student with a learning disability could be someone who has Dyslexia, Dyscalculia or Dysgraphia. Effective accommodations for students with learning disabilities include:

* Extended time for testing and tasks
* Use of a computer with a spell-checking program
* Use of a calculator
* Copies of overheads, handouts, lecture notes in advance
* Reduced distraction environment for testing
* Preferential seating near the front of the class
* Notetaking support – either human notetaker or guided notes

## **Effective Accommodations for Students with Cognitive Impairments: (3)**

Below are some accommodations that could benefit students with cognitive impairments:

* Provide a quiet workspace
* Engage students in functional activities
* Allow for repetition to master concepts
* Create hands on learning tasks
* Keep a routine
* Provide time for breaks throughout the day

## **Designing Effective Learning for Environments Students with Visual Impairments through Collaboration with Specialists**

### **Special Educators and Vision Specialists: (5)**

General education teachers serving students with visual impairments would benefit from working in collaboration with vision specialists. Vision specialists should be a part of the team of professionals working to ensure that students are receiving appropriate services and accommodations. Vision specialists can help determine what goals and related services should be included in the individualized education program (IEP) of the students, as well as what types of accommodations are needed in the classroom.

General educators will find these colleagues a valuable source of information and assistance that will help them capitalize on students’ abilities and help them reach their full potential. General educators who consult regularly with vision specialists are better able to create learning experiences appropriate for their students with visual impairments.

## **Case Studies:**

Based on what we have learned thus far, we are going to explore case studies for three different students. For each student, write on a piece of paper two things you can do to provide accommodations or curriculum modifications to help support these students in your classroom:

Devon is in the fourth grade and is diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, which is a physical disability. He uses a manual wheelchair and can move around independently. However, he becomes very fatigued later in the day and especially late in the afternoon. His verbal speech is easy to understand when he is not fatigued, and he enjoys speaking with his classmates and the teacher. He is especially good at math and can do most calculations in his head. He struggles with reading since he cannot hold the book independently and he struggles with writing because he has difficulty holding a standard pencil. It is clear to you, his teacher, that he is very bright and has an eagerness to learn. As his teacher, what are some ways you can support him with accommodations or modifications to support his learning?

Alexandra is in sixth grade and has always had difficulty organizing her thoughts for writing assignments, as well as organization overall. She frequently forgets materials or where she placed her belongings. She has a hard time writing out information in a logical way, though she is able to verbally relay information in great detail. She is concerned that as she is getting older and her academic responsibilities and challenges increase, she will have a hard time keeping up with her peers. She is concerned about transitioning to high school and beyond. It is clear to you, her teacher, that she is very capable and has enormous potential. As her teacher, what are some ways you can support her with accommodations or modifications to support her learning?

Jared is a friendly 3-year-old student with a cognitive. He enjoys participating in all play activities, particularly music. He interacts with his family members and preschool teachers by smiling, laughing, and pointing to objects, but he does not speak in words. He occasionally points to a picture that is in his vicinity. Jared vocalizes and uses a few intelligible words to communicate. Jared tries to join in when his siblings are singing but feels frustrated when he cannot. He also attempts to choose a song that he wants his mother to sing but can do so only when given a choice between two songs, and this often frustrates him. His family members try to help him communicate and be a part of the family activities, but they have to depend a lot on guessing what he prefers. The mother has started to use some pictures with him, and his responses are quick and do not show any frustration. As his teacher, what are some ways you can support him with accommodations or modifications to support his learning at this very early age?

### **Checklist for Classroom Strategies and Adaptations for students with visual impairments:**

The table below is a checklist to reference for strategies and tools that might help students with visual impairments thrive in your inclusion classroom.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Classroom Supplies and Equipment** | **Yes** | **N/A** | **More Information** |
| Raised-line or bold-line paper, templates, and/or writing guides |  |  |  |
| Soft lead pencils |  |  |  |
| Felt-tip pens (various widths; high contrast colours) |  |  |  |
| Supplementary light source (e.g., desk lamp) |  |  |  |
| Assistive devices such as laptops with screen readers, android tablets or phones |  |  |  |
| Magnification device |  |  |  |
| Book stand |  |  |  |
| Sun visor or light shield to reduce glare |  |  |  |
| Large print reading materials (pre-printed or produced using computer technology) |  |  |  |
| Physical education equipment with auditory signals (e.g., sound balls) |  |  |  |

### **Checklist for Instructional strategies for students with disabilities:**

The table below is a checklist to reference for strategies and tools that might help students with various disabilities thrive in your inclusion classroom.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Instructional Strategies** | **Yes** | **N/A** | **More Information** |
| Does the student need sit closer to see board, videos, demonstrations, etc. |  |  |  |
| Has the student received copies of teacher notes in accessible digital formats |  |  |  |
| Did the teacher read notes aloud while writing them on board |  |  |  |
| Did the teacher provide audio recordings of reading material |  |  |  |
| Is the student encouraged to turn in written responses using digital tools |  |  |  |
| Did the student receive enlarged books, worksheets, etc. |  |  |  |
| Did the teacher provide opportunities for hands-on learning |  |  |  |
| Are distractions limited as much as possible for the student |  |  |  |
| Was the student given extra time to complete tasks |  |  |  |
| Did the student receive notes from a human note taker |  |  |  |

### **Checklist for safety of students with disabilities:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Safety Considerations** | **Yes** | **N/A** | **More Information** |
| Evaluate environment for potential hazard areas for walking or wheelchair use (e.g., stairs, playground structures, dimly lit areas) |  |  |  |
| Ensure that doors, windows, and storage areas are completely open or completely closed at all times |  |  |  |
| Ensure that student knows routines for fire drills and other emergency procedures |  |  |  |

### **Checklists collaboration with specialists to support students with disabilities:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Collaborating with Other Professionals** | **Yes** | **N/A** | **More Information** |
| Meet and know schedules of specialists who might work with student (e.g., orientation and mobility, itinerant vision educator, occupational therapist, etc.) |  |  |  |
| Learn how and when student uses sighted guide, long cane, etc. for travel |  |  |  |
| Learn about magnification devices, screen readers, and other equipment available to and used by student |  |  |  |
| Learn about student’s strengths/weaknesses and academic needs and develop appropriate strategies |  |  |  |
| Become familiar with individualized education programs (IEP) goals and objectives and other services specified to be provided |  |  |  |

## **Conclusion:**

From this module, the reader has learned:

* What inclusion is and why it is important.
* What Early intervention is and why it is important
* What Universal Design for Learning is and how to accommodate children with disabilities and modify the curriculum so they can have full access to learning materials
* How to use checklists to prepare accessible learning materials for students with special needs

Inclusion classrooms provide a better-quality education for all children. For students with disabilities to thrive in inclusion settings, they must receive accommodations and modifications as necessary. It is the role of the teacher to provide support to students with disabilities so they can achieve their highest potential.

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## Annexure A:

What is included in an Early Intervention Plan: The information below is adapted from the following website: <https://fhfofgno.org/resources/early-intervention-babies-toddlers>

## Writing the early intervention plan:

After collecting data about the child’s strengths and weaknesses, the team (including parents) will write anindividualized plan of action for the child and family.

**Guiding principles**: The early intervention plan is a written document that, among other things, outlines the early intervention services that your child and family will receive. One guiding principle of the early intervention plan is that the family is a child’s greatest resource, that a young child’s needs are closely tied to the needs of his or her family. The **early intervention plan is a whole family plan** with the parents as major contributors in its development. Involvement of other team members will depend on what the child needs. These other team members could come from several agencies and may include medical professionals, therapists, child development specialists, social workers, and others.

**What info is included in an early intervention plan?**

Your child’s plan must include the following:

* Your child’s present physical, cognitive, communication, social/emotional, and adaptive development levels and needs
* Family information (with your agreement), including the resources, priorities, and concerns of you, as parents, and other family members closely involved with the child
* The major results or outcomes expected to be achieved for your child and family
* The specific services your child will be receiving
* When and where in the natural environment (e.g., home, community) the services will be provided
* The number of days or sessions he or she will receive each service and how long each session will last
* The name of the service coordinator overseeing the implementation of the early intervention plan
* The steps to be taken to support your child’s transition out of early intervention and into another program when the time comes.

**Reviewing and updating the early intervention plan**: The plan should be reviewed periodically, possibly every six months and is updated at least once a year. This takes into account that children can learn, grow, and change quickly in just a short period of time.