



Teaching Infants Toddlers & Twos with Special Needs

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Think about these statements!

1. An infant with a developmental delay is not "broken."
2. Infants and toddlers grow up in a world where everyone is not the same.
3. For your program to be successful, it must reflect a team approach to planning for an infant with developmental delays.
4. You should welcome and encourage the input and ongoing involvement of all participants, especially the child's family.



5. Inclusive programs model the belief that all children are entitled to experience developmentally-appropriate materials and exemplary classroom practices that value the child's strengths and work to improve the child's weaknesses.
6. It is important to understand that no single method, process, or product works for every child.
7. Quality programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities will allow you to recognize when something works, and to be able to change and adapt when something does not work.

General Guidelines

- Model a belief that every child in your classroom is important.
- Help typically-developing infants and toddlers accept their peers with developmental delays.



Attachment



- Provide a secure base for the child, as he begins to explore the world around him.
- Be physically and emotionally available to meet the child's needs.
- Respond with sensitivity to the child's feelings.
- Recognize the child as a unique individual whose wishes, feelings, and goals are valid and meaningful.
- Accept the child – building self esteem.

Promoting family membership –

- Early relationships may influence overall development.
- There appears to be a strong relationship between secure attachments and positive social outcomes for the future.
- Special needs may reduce the infant's capacity to engage in rewarding interactions.
- Special needs of the infant may result in discomfort and interactive difficulties on the part of the caregivers.
- Mutually satisfying interactions may be the basis from which other positive interventions stem.

Positive Interactions

- Plan activities that require taking turns or give-and-take.
- Adjust to the child's cues. If he looks away, assume the game is over.
- Imitate what the child does and encourage him to imitate you.
- Play games, sing songs, and talk to the child.
- Use facial expressions that indicate you are enjoying the activity.
- Recognize that children with special needs may not respond in typical ways.

Key Concepts for Infants

- Cause and effect, or learning that an action can cause a reaction, is a very important concept..
- Place a rattle or scarf in the infant's line of vision and shake it.
- Then, give it to the infant and see if he will imitate your movements in order to make it rattle.
- If he doesn't, place your hand gently over his and repeat the activity.



General Suggestions for Infants with Developmental Challenges



- Follow the child's lead. Try to engage the child by using objects that interest him..
- Look for opportunities throughout daily routines that encourage choice-making.
- Natural consequences. It is important the infant learns the natural consequence for an action, such as when activating a pull-toy the toy moves.
- Consistent responses.

- Set the child up to succeed.
- Break tasks into manageable steps.
- Provide opportunities to practice.
- Use daily routines as times to learn.
- Work collaboratively with the child's family



Skills for Older Infants

- Solving a new problem using trial and error: Try modeling for the child how to solve the problem.
- Follow a simple command:
 - Often, children with special needs do not understand what you are asking them to do.
 - To help them understand better, use multiple cues, such as pointing, modeling, and pictures.
 - As mentioned, you may have to show the child several times, before he is able to complete the task or solve the problem.



Combining one or two actions

- Use gestures or picture sequence cards, as a way to show him what you want him to do.
- Breaking a task into smaller steps and modeling each step for him can also be extremely helpful.
- Remember to use **shaping** to reinforce each approximation toward the final goal that the child achieves.

- Imitate an action after watching it modeled: To help children with special needs imitate actions, such as clapping their hands to music or standing up when their name is called, it is important to break the action into simple steps and demonstrate each one for the child.
- Object permanence: Because they often do not generalize well, it is important to set up activities that help children with special needs learn about object permanence.



Toddler Behavior (Tantrum)

- Teach the child to use a gesture or sign to indicate when he is upset or wants something.
- Provide a place where the child can go to be quiet when the activity around him becomes overwhelming. This "quiet area" should have soft lighting and comfortable seating.
- Learn to identify specific warning signs that a child is getting frustrated or upset and redirect his attention before an outburst occurs.



Separation Anxiety

- Help the child feel safe and reassured that the adult will return, but do not dwell on the subject. If the child repeatedly asks when mommy or daddy will be back, try to redirect him to a fun activity or game.
- Help the child develop social skills to cope with being left by the parent. If he feels more confident, he may be less anxious.
- Encourage routines that help the child feel secure, such as having a "Morning Welcome Time." Remember to address the child by name when he arrives at school.
- If the toddler gets upset and screams or cries, make sure he has time to transition to his new surroundings and circumstances, and time to calm down before directing him to an activity.





Building Pre-literacy Skills

- Select books that are of interest to the child and read with them often.
- Provide picture books and board books for the child to explore.
- Build phonological awareness by helping children see and use the sounds in words.
- Play games and sing songs that develop oral language and listening skills.

Toddler Humor

- Variations on Peek-A-Boo include encouraging the child to "hide" under a scarf or blanket while you "search" for him, or covering your face half-way when you play the game. You can also build on the idea behind peek-a-boo, which is to teach body parts. For example, cover your left hand with a scarf, wiggle your fingers under the scarf, and say, "Where are my fingers?" See if the child will lift the scarf to find them.
- Ring Around the Rosy. Play this game the traditional way if the child is able. If not, look for ways in which he can partially participate. One way may be walking along with him and helping him "fall down" by lowering him with your arms. Try variations, such as "all run around," "jump up and down," or "touch the ground."
- Old MacDonald Had a Farm. Once a child knows animal sounds, what could be funnier than substituting a child's name for an animal, such as, "On his farm he had a Brandon, ei-ei-o," etc.





- Rhyme Time. Toddlers love rhyming sounds, especially funny rhyming names. Use a child's name to make up nonsensical chants, and encourage the child to follow along and make up his own rhymes.
- Mirror, Mirror on the Wall! Sit with the child in front of a mirror. Make a funny face, wait, and see if the child will attempt to imitate you or maybe even make a funny face of his own!

Summary- Toddler Behavior

- A toddler's newly-developed motor skills (like walking, running, and climbing) provide opportunities for exploration and cognitive development, as she learns new ways to solve problems.
- A child's new awareness of the consequences of being more independent can result in bouts of separation anxiety, as well as internal conflicts between a desire to explore and a desire to be near those he is most comfortable with.



- During the toddler months, developmental milestones vary widely..
- Signs that a toddler's developmental delay is more than just a "lag" in development will become more apparent during these months.
- Other than several delayed milestone achievements, signs that should alert a teacher
 - include the toddler's frequent irritability,
 - the fact that she seldom smiles,
 - makes few or no sounds, and
 - shows no interest in exploration or interaction with others.



- As hand-eye coordination improves (usually around age two), most toddlers enjoy activities like puzzles, blocks, scribbling, and drawing.
- By age three, language skills develop rapidly and vocabulary increases dramatically. Reciting nursery rhymes, singing songs, and reading books are especially fun and appropriate activities for a child this age.



Infant and Toddler Environments Setting the Stage for Success



- Arrange the physical space to ensure environment is accessible by all children.
- Follow a daily schedule that promotes optimal activity and development, while keeping in mind the unique needs of a young child with special needs.
- Set up activity areas and learning centers that encourage learning, along with play and exploration.
- Promote independence.
- Provide appropriate and adaptable materials that enable learning of important problem-solving skills.
- Provide environments that promote positive interactions and the development of social skills.



Environments

1. Foster personal identity and a sense of belonging.
2. Enable children to develop confidence and master new skills.
3. Provide opportunities for growth in stimulating surroundings.
4. Encourage a sense of security and trust by being safe, warm, inviting, and predictable.
5. Designed so that children have opportunities for both social interaction and privacy.

Arranging the Physical Space for Accessibility by all Children

- Materials designed to be challenging and provide feedback.
- Adults who know how to read non-verbal communication signs.
- A physical setting that is not too crowded or overwhelming.



Arranging the Daily Schedule

- When arranging a daily schedule for infants with special needs, it is important to allow as much flexibility as possible. In general, these aspects should be considered:
- Most infants are more alert in the morning.
- There should be multiple times during the day allotted for active play, rest, eating, and quiet play.
- Feeding an infant with special needs may take longer than usual.
- While some infants with special needs require more rest and sleep than their peers, many require less.
- Consideration must be given for the child's therapies, such as speech, language, physical therapy, or occupational therapy.



The toddler arrives

- Greet the child the same way each day.
- Lean or squat down, so you are at eye level with him, and remember to call him by name.
- Keep in mind that a child with special needs, especially a child with sensory impairments, may respond better if you gently touch him on the arm or shoulder when you address him.
- Try using music to help the toddler transition to your classroom.



Welcome Song (sung to the tune of *Three Visually Challenged Mice*)

Hello _____ (child's name)

Hello _____ (child's name)

I'm glad you're here.

I'm glad you're here.

Let's put your things away and find out what to do today. I'm glad you're here!
I'm glad you're here!



Communication Apron

- May be bought
- Easy to make
- Velcro
- Pictures
- Try a shoe rack?



The toddler schedule

- large group time (usually two or more per day);
- small group time;
- individual instruction;
- free-choice time (usually spent in learning centers);
- creative activities (art, music, drama, etc.);
- transitions between activities; and
- time for active play and climbing, either outdoors or indoors.

Large Group Time (KISS!)

- Plan activities that require participation by the whole class.
- Keep large group time as short as possible.
- Make the activity as meaningful as possible for the child with special needs.
- Incorporate movement and music during the large group instruction.
- Make sure seating is comfortable.
- Consider making large group time optional.

Small Group Time

- Review what was previously learned, keeping in mind that after a long break like a holiday or long weekend, the child may need extra review.
- Remember that children with special needs have trouble generalizing information; provide as many concrete examples as possible.
- During small group time, provide multiple opportunities for participation.
- Ask questions frequently and look for ways to keep the child engaged. If he is non-verbal, look for ways to help him be part of the group.
- Offer the child opportunities to practice.
- Toddlers with special needs require extra time to process new information, so plan accordingly.
- Provide positive feedback, and don't forget to praise a child for his attempts, even if those attempts are not successful.



Modifications for Learning Centers	
Center	Modifications
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place books that feature people with disabilities as part of the community. • Offer plenty of large "board books" that have bright pictures. • Provide books that make noise when they are opened or have different textures that a child can touch, such as in <i>Pat the Bunny</i>. • Children with motor delays may need adaptive equipment, such as a "page-turner," to help him turn pages, or a special switch, to help him turn a tape recorder on and off.
Block	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer blocks of different sizes and other materials that can be stacked, such as clean plastic food containers or boxes. • Consider using blocks with handles or knobs, so a child with motor delays can participate in building activities.
Manipulatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide puzzles with knobs and handles. • Offer activities that help develop fine motor skills, such as the Rock 'n Stack or the Fisher Price Activity Center™.
Exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer magnifying glasses of varying strengths. If possible, try to provide one with a built-in light. • Provide large and small items to explore. Add a pair of tongs, to help children with fine motor issues pick up objects.

Modifications for Learning Centers	
Center	Modifications
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to dance, sing, and play music instruments. • Adapt tape recorders with switches so that children can turn them on and off more easily.
Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adaptive paintbrushes and double-hold scissors for children with motor issues. • Assure the art materials are available in bright colors. • Provide a variety of textures and art media (clay, paint, paper, sand, etc.) to encourage exploration of new things.
Computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure there is an adaptive keyboard, such as Intellikeys™ (see appendix – Adaptive Equipment), available for children with special needs. • Provide computer programs for varying abilities and skills. Programs that offer instant feedback are especially good for children with special needs.

Quiet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Make sure there are comfortable places to sit and the lighting is soft. •Provide an audio player with headphones, so the child can listen to music. If necessary, fit the player with an adaptive switch or battery interrupter so the child can turn it on and off.
Dress-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Place clothes in the dress-up center that have buttons and zippers, to give the child extra practice. •Provide clothes of varying colors, and invite the child to sort them by color, shape, size, etc. •Include hats, caps, and accessories, such as shoes and purses.
Home Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Make sure some of the materials have large handles for the child to grip. •Home living is a great center for role-play. For example, children can role-play enjoying meals with friends or everyday routines, such as getting ready for bed or preparing for school. •Place sequence cards for everyday things, like setting the table or getting ready for school, in the center. The cards will help the child learn the steps of routine activities.

Modifications for Non-Traditional Learning Centers	
Center	Modifications
Touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide objects and materials of varying shapes, textures, and sizes. • Make "feely" boxes with things of different textures hidden inside. Remember, some children may be hesitant to put their hands into a box. Offer to do the activity with the child.
Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This center can reinforce in-class activities, by giving children an opportunity to practice friendship skills. • Role-playing activities or friendship circles (a circle where friends sit and talk) are all useful, and can help children with special needs interact with their peers. • Include activities that children can do together, such as building with blocks or painting a mural.
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature people and places that are foreign to them or different from what they are used to. Provide props to go with each activity. This center may help you in continuing to teach about diversity. • Bring foods from other cultures for the children to sample, to help them learn about new and different tastes. This is also a good center for collaborative activities.

Activities for Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs

- Contingency response needs:
- Consider the unique learning needs of each child:
- Plan activities based on your knowledge of the child's ability



Techniques to Help Infants and Toddlers Learn a New Skill

- Successive approximation or shaping is a technique that supports a child, as she attempts a task.
- Modeling is often necessary, to help a toddler understand how to complete a task.
- Cueing is a technique used by the teacher that gives the child clues about what she is expected to do.



Communication Basics

- **Form**
 - A way to communicate
- **Function**
 - A reason to communication
- **Content**
 - Experiences to communicate about

Toddler Social Skills

- friendship skills,
- turn taking,
- learning simple rules, and
- participating in a play group or small group activity.



- Turn-Taking Skills: Let's face it – none of us likes to wait for a turn. However, learning to wait is an important life skill for every child. Facilitate this learning process in toddlers with special needs by redirecting their attention to another activity while they wait, teaching them to ask for a turn, or minimizing the waiting time. This is not to say that a child with special needs should always be first in line.



- Learning Simple Rules: Whether your classroom rules are depicted by pictures on the wall or set forth by gentle verbal reminders, it is important to note that children with special needs will need extra instruction in learning rules.

10 Communication Rules for working with Parents

1. Listen! Listen! Listen! Listen! Listen!
2. Speak politely and positively.
3. Establish partnerships based on mutual trust and respect.
4. Use inviting non-verbal communications and avoid using words like "should" and "ought."
5. Explain information in ways that are understandable.
6. Encourage parent's involvement by asking open-ended questions.
7. Support parents in developing the skills necessary to become strong advocates for themselves and their family.
8. Appreciate cultural diversity.
9. Respect individual differences, desires, needs, and values.
10. Adopt an attitude of equal partnership.
