FYSB Family & Youth Services Bureau

Increasing Equity in the Classroom for Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Tips for Using Classroom Accommodations

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years, federal statutes have recognized youth's right to an equitable education. For example, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ☑ and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are two federal laws that protect people with disabilities. They ensure protection in the workforce, in accessing social services, and at school. These laws help students get special education services in public schools (NAD, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Youth who are eligible for special education have various intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Intellectual disabilities involve "significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior" ☑ (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2019). Developmental disabilities are "an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas" (CDC, 2019). IDD include attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities that affect verbal skills, reading, spelling, mathematics, and memory. They also include visual impairments, degenerative disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

> "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States...shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."
>
> *–Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*

> "Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities."
>
> *–Section 1400 (c) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

The Role of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Grantees

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) grantees provide programming to youth in a variety of settings, including public schools. The latest survey from the Digest of Education Statistics shows that the number of students ages 3–21 getting IDEA services has increased. It rose from 6.4 million students (13%) in 2010–2011 to 7.3 million students (15%) in 2021–2022 (Irwin et al., 2023). Therefore, as an APP grantee, **you are likely to have youth with IDD in your classrooms.**

The Need for Accommodations for Youth with IDD

Accommodations ☐ are adaptations to educational environments, materials, or practices that make it easier for youth with IDD to learn. Accommodations change how students access information without changing what the student is required to learn or reducing the requirements of the task. Some youth may struggle to complete entry/exit surveys or other assessments if they lack fine motor skills. Youth with ADHD may need extended testing time. Tools such as speech-to-text software or timers can lessen the challenges youth face.

This tip sheet introduces some common accommodations for youth with IDD in public school settings. These accommodations will help you ensure that your programming serves diverse youth. In other settings like juvenile justice facilities, foster homes, or community organizations, you may not know if youth have diagnosed disabilities. Understanding classroom accommodations may help you provide tools and materials for students with IDD who need extra support.

A note about modifications.

Another set of tools and strategies are modifications. Although accommodations change *how* a student learns, modifications change *what* they learn. Modifications can also reduce task requirements to support learning. They can include shortened assignments and text at a lower reading level (IRIS Center, n.d.-a). In sexual health curricula, modifications may be seen as a type of "red light adaptation ☐." You should discuss these with a curriculum developer because they may harm or remove a program's core components, making it less effective. This tip sheet focuses on accommodations.

What is an Individualized Educational Program (IEP)?

"The IEP is a written document, developed collaboratively by the IEP team, which outlines a student's current level of development, educational goals, and all necessary services and supports (e.g., special education services, related services, accommodations, modifications)" (IRIS Center, n.d.-a). An IEP will state the types of accommodations and modifications youth receive. According to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, schools are allowed to disclose student records to certain parties, including "school officials with legitimate educational interest" (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Check with school administration or teachers to see if they can share a student's IEP. This will help you understand the needs of youth in your APP programs.
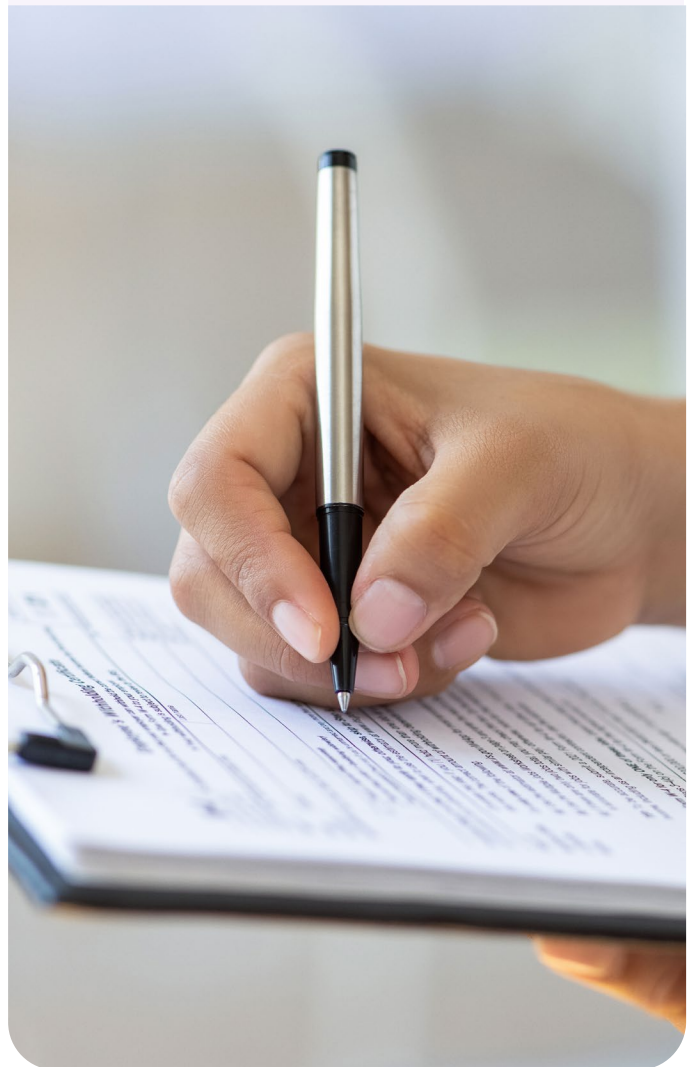
THE FOUR TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS
PRESENTATION, RESPONSE, TIMING/SCHEDULING, AND SETTING

PRESENTATION Accommodations (Adapted from IRIS Center, n.d.-b)

What are they? Presentation accommodations adjust instruction. They make the content and instructions easier for students to understand and remember. They affect how students process the information they learn. They do not change the content or lower the quality of instruction for students with disabilities.

Who typically needs these types of accommodations? Youth who have learning disabilities and struggle to understand speech and text, pay attention, or remember information may need presentation accommodations. Some youth with ASD may also have trouble understanding information presented verbally. Youth with ADHD may struggle to identify main points in a lecture (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2022).

Example presentation accommodations:

- Provide an outline with key points from the material.
- Include images or highlighted text.
- Use 3-D and tactile objects (e.g., dolls with human anatomy to teach parts of the body or about consent).
- Ask students to repeat or paraphrase instructions.
- Use role play to explain concepts. Students in the classroom can act out an example of asking for consent.
- Show a video.
- Read key pieces of information aloud together.
- Provide explicit/direct instruction. Use scripts, schedules, or immediate feedback to correct errors (Steinbrenner et al., 2020).

RESPONSE Accommodations (Adapted from IRIS Center, n.d.-c)

What are they? Response accommodations are alternative methods to test student knowledge. They make it easier for students to show their learning but still test students for all learning objectives and essential content.

Who typically needs these types of accommodations? Students with IDD may struggle to express themselves in writing and speech. A learning disability may make it difficult for them to organize their thoughts. Students with ADHD often act on impulse. They may jump into assignments or tasks without understanding what is expected (CHADD, 2018). Additionally, some students struggle with muscle control and dexterity. These challenges may make it hard for them to complete assessments such as multiple choice questions, open text responses, essays, and class presentations.

Example response accommodations:

- Have students circle answers in a booklet rather than transfer them to an answer sheet.
- Let students use a graphic organizer ⬀ instead of open text responses.
- Ask the student to circle/point to images of the correct answer.
- Provide the student with text-to-speech software. Or, ask them to audio record their responses.

TIMING/SCHEDULING Accommodations (Adapted from IRIS Center, n.d.-e)

What are they? Timing/scheduling accommodations let students complete work and assignments at a different pace or with extra time. This helps reduce fatigue and frustration.

Who typically needs these types of accommodations? Students with processing disorders, attention challenges, dexterity challenges, testing anxiety, or who use assistive technology can all benefit from timing/scheduling accommodations. These students may need more time to think of a response. They may also need to write out their answers or use an assistive device. They may also need extra time if they struggle with attention.

Example timing/scheduling accommodations:

- Give students 1.5 to 2 times the usual amount of time for an assignment. Or, let them finish it after the session ends.
- Allow the student to complete work in smaller blocks of time.
- Use a timer to schedule timed breaks during test or instructional time.
- Place time limits for completing an assignment. This will help those who struggle to manage their time well.

SETTING Accommodations (Adapted from IRIS Center, n.d.-d)

What are they? Setting accommodations change the learning or testing environment.

Who typically needs these types of accommodations? Students who have trouble with attention or self-regulation may benefit from setting accommodations. They may have frequent outbursts and disrupt other students. They may also have trouble with disorganization or have sensory-processing disorders. These students may need to sit in a place free from distractions. Distractions might include activity outside the classroom window or classmates who provoke them. They may also need to arrange their setting to better access their materials.

Example setting accommodations:

- Offer the student preferential seating (near you or in another location).
- Give the student a tri-fold poster board during independent work to block distractions or a separate classroom space for individual work. This should not be seen as punishment or isolation.
- Reduce the number of distractions around the student (e.g., extra pencils, pens, non-relevant text or materials).
- Give the student small fidget objects.
- Give the student noise-reducing headphones.
- Give the student a checklist of supplies for an activity or a task list.

USING ACCOMMODATIONS IN PRACTICE

Test and refine your knowledge of accommodations. Read the profiles of each youth below. Check off all accommodations you think could help the student in each scenario. Note that all accommodations are rarely used together in practice. Then, hover over the boxes at the bottom of each table. They contain commonly suggested accommodations for each youth.

Evelyn

Youth with ADHD

Associated characteristics:

- Impulsive
- Difficulty identifying main points in instruction
- Distracted by noise and movement
- Gets fidgety easily
- Easily influenced by actions of others

Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Dolls, 3-D models	Dictionaries, calculators, spell checkers, and other computer software	Timers for assessments	Stress balls, fidgets, exercise band looped around a chair's legs (to kick)
Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined	Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates	Frequent breaks	Preferential seating
Magnification device	Recording device/ Application	Cues for transitions (timer, music, speaker)	Social and emotional learning techniques
Audio tapes, digital textbooks, text-to-speech software	Speech-to-text software	Extra time on assessments	Visual supports (labeled containers, color-coded binders)
Classroom expectations/group agreements	Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers)	Time limits for assessments	Checklist of needed supplies
Sample models of assignments	Markers to help students track	Brain breaks	Noise-canceling headphones
Repeated or paraphrased instructions	Multiple modes of assessment (oral, written, visual)	Multiple sessions to complete assignments	Working while standing or in different positions
Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	Multiple modes of assessment (live or video-taped)		Slant board or sloped writing surface

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Evelyn *Youth with ADHD*	Designated reader to read aloud test questions			Task list for activity completion
	Rubrics, checklists, task lists			Use of non-verbal cues/picture cues
Commonly Suggested Accommodations:	• Repeated or paraphrased instructions • Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined • Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	Markers to help students track	• Timers for assessments • Frequent breaks • Cues for transitions (timer, music, speaker) • Extra time on assessments	• Stress balls, fidgets, exercise band looped around a chair's legs (to kick) • Preferential seating • Noise-canceling headphones

Adapted from IRIS Center (n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d) and Morin (n.d.).

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Willow *Youth with Learning Disability* Associated characteristics: • Difficulty identifying and remembering important information • Trouble organizing thoughts in writing • Trouble organizing desk materials (worksheets out of order, notes v. class handouts, not sure which • Processes information slowly • Reluctant to share thoughts and ideas in front of others	Dolls, 3-D models	Dictionaries, calculators, spell checkers, and other computer software	Timers for assessments	Stress balls, fidgets, exercise band looped around a chair's legs (to kick)
	Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined	Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates	Frequent breaks	Preferential seating
	Magnification device	Recording device/Application	Cues for transitions (timer, music, speaker)	Social and emotional learning techniques
	Audio tapes, digital textbooks, text-to-speech software	Speech-to-text software	Extra time on assessments	Visual supports (labeled containers, color-coded binders)
	Classroom expectations/group agreements	Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers)	Time limits for assessments	Checklist of needed supplies
	Sample models of assignments	Markers to help students track	Brain breaks	Noise-canceling headphones
	Repeated or paraphrased instructions	Multiple modes of assessment (oral, written, visual)	Multiple sessions to complete assignments	Working while standing or in different positions
	Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	Multiple modes of assessment (live or video-taped)		Slant board or sloped writing surface
	Designated reader who reads test questions to students			Task list for activity completion

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Willow *Youth with Learning Disability*	Rubrics, checklists, task lists			Use of non-verbal cues/picture cues
Commonly Suggested Accommodations:	• Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined • Sample models of assignments • Repeated or paraphrased instructions, rubrics, checklists	• Dictionaries, calculators, spell checkers, and other computer software • Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates	Extra time on assessments	• Visual supports (labeled containers, color-coded binders) • Checklist of needed supplies

Adapted from IRIS Center (n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d) and Morin (n.d.).

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Noah *Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)* Associated characteristics: • Difficulty comprehending information verbally • Difficulty expressing thoughts/ feelings verbally • High sensitivity to noise • Sensory overload when working with peers • Challenges with dexterity • Difficulty self-regulating	Dolls, 3-D models	Dictionaries, calculators, spell checkers, and other computer software	Timers for assessments	Stress balls, fidgets, exercise band looped around a chair's legs (to kick)
	Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined	Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates	Frequent breaks	Preferential seating
	Magnification device	Recording device/ Application	Cues for transitions (timer, music, speaker)	Social and emotional learning techniques
	Audio tapes, digital textbooks, text-to-speech software	Speech-to-text software	Extra time on assessments	Visual supports (labeled containers, color-coded binders)
	Classroom expectations/group agreements	Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers)	Time limits for assessments	Checklist of needed supplies
	Sample models of assignments	Markers to help students track	Brain breaks	Noise-canceling headphones
	Repeated or paraphrased instructions	Multiple modes of assessment (oral, written, visual)	Multiple sessions to complete assignments	Working while standing or in different positions
	Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	Multiple modes of assessment (live or video-taped)		Slant board or sloped writing surface
	Designated reader who reads test questions to students			Task list for activity completion

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Noah *Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*	Rubrics, checklists, task lists			Use of non-verbal cues/picture cues
Commonly Suggested Accommodations:	• Dolls, 3-D models • Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined • Sample models of assignments • Repeated or paraphrased instructions, rubrics, checklists • Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	• Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates • Speech-to-text software • Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers) • Multiple modes of assessment (live or video-taped)	Extra time on assessments	• Preferential seating • Social and emotional learning techniques • Noise-canceling headphones

Adapted from IRIS Center (n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d) and Morin (n.d.).

Jayden

Youth with Developmental Coordination Disorder

Associated characteristics:

- Trouble applying the correct amount of pressure when writing
- Poor handwriting
- Trouble doing assignments in the correct order

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
	Dolls, 3-D models	Dictionaries, calculators, spell checkers, and other computer software	Timers for assessments	Stress balls, fidgets, exercise band looped around a chair's legs (to kick)
	Color-coded information, sheet with key facts outlined	Large font paper, graphic organizers and templates	Frequent breaks	Preferential seating
	Magnification device	Recording device/ Application	Cues for transitions (timer, music, speaker)	Social and emotional learning techniques
	Audio tapes, digital textbooks, text-to-speech software	Speech-to-text software	Extra time on assessments	Visual supports (labeled containers, color-coded binders)
	Classroom expectations/group agreements	Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers)	Time limits for assessments	Checklist of needed supplies
	Sample models of assignments	Markers to help students track	Brain breaks	Noise-canceling headphones
	Repeated or paraphrased instructions	Multiple modes of assessment (oral, written, visual)	Multiple sessions to complete assignments	Working while standing or in different positions
	Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written)	Multiple modes of assessment (live or video-taped)		Slant board or sloped writing surface
	Designated reader who reads test questions to students			Task list for activity completion

	Presentation Accommodations	Response Accommodations	Timing/Scheduling Accommodations	Setting Accommodations
Jayden *Youth with Developmental Coordination Disorder*	Rubrics, checklists, task lists			Use of non-verbal cues/picture cues
Commonly Suggested Accommodations:	• Multiple formats for presenting information (orally, visually, written) • Rubrics, checklists	• Speech-to-text software • Pencil grips, alternative writing utensils (gel pens, thin markers)	Extra time on assessments	• Working while standing or in different positions • Slant board or sloped writing surface

Adapted from IRIS Center (n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d) and Morin (n.d.).

Final Note

These accommodations can improve a young person's educational experience, but educators have to choose accommodations carefully. Some accommodations may draw unwanted attention to a student, causing embarrassment. In these cases, you can consider accommodating all students. This way, it won't draw attention to any one student. An accommodation may offer short-term help, but it might also create a dependency that could hinder a student later. Students are often left out of the discussion around their own accommodations. As students transition to high school, joining the conversation empowers them to drive their learning needs. Allow youth to provide input on what types of accommodations are best for their long-term goals (IRIS Center, n.d.-f). For example, if a student's goal is to finish tests without extra time in college, educators may decide to work with the student in high school to gradually decrease the extra time. When you can, connect with your students' main classroom teachers and learn about their IEPs. Learn how to use accommodations in a way that considers each student's learning needs.

RESOURCES

A History of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Elavatus Training ↗

Classroom Accommodations (CHADD) ↗

Common Accommodations and Modifications in School (understood.org) ↗

Classroom Accommodations for Developmental Coordination Disorder ↗

Educators and Service Providers – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

General Adaptation Guidance (ETR) ↗

Graphic Organizers – Learning Disabilities Association of America (ldaamerica.org) ↗

Modeling and Practicing: Training Modules | NCII (intensiveintervention.org) ↗

Professional Resources | Council for Exceptional Children ↗

Research & Resources | NCAEP | The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (unc.edu) ↗

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