



Adding Options and Broadening Accommodations

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/addingoptions.pdf>)

Everyone knows classroom programs must offer variety to mesh with student interests. And, more variety seems necessary for some students. This is especially so for those with low motivation for or negative attitudes about school. For such individuals, few currently available options may be appealing. How much greater the range of options must be depends primarily on the strength of their avoidance tendencies. Determining what will engage them is a major teaching challenge and an immediate focus for Response to Intervention and prereferral intervening.

Response to Intervention and prereferral intervening are forms of special assistance. The intent is to reduce unnecessary referrals for *specialized services*, such as counseling or special education programs. At the same time, students' responses to such interventions provide assessment and diagnostic data about the need for referral. Without a strong emphasis on providing this form of special assistance, referral systems become flooded and help for many students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems grinds to a halt.

Reducing unnecessary referrals requires enhancing the capacity of classroom staff to assess problems and implement special assistance. Staff concerned with mental health can play critical roles in helping build such capacity and implementing Response to Intervention and other prereferral strategies.

Besides adding options, it is imperative to accommodate a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated. For example, environments can be changed to better account for youngsters who are very active and/or distractable. For some students, initially certain behavioral expectations and standards must be relaxed a bit. This means widening limits for a time so that certain behaviors are not an infringement of the rules. *Accommodative strategies are intended to affect students' motivation by involving them in activities they value and believe are attainable with appropriate effort* (see Exhibits).

Remember that, in general, the initial focus in working with students with low motivation or negative attitudes is on ensuring programs are a good fit. This requires dialoguing with them and facilitating their efforts to

- identify a range of learning options and accommodations they perceive as of considerable personal value and as attainable with an appropriate amount of effort (including, as necessary, alternatives to established curriculum content and processes);
- make personal and active decisions.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS at UCLA

The center at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA

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Exhibit

Accommodations

If students seem easily distracted, the following might be used:

- » identify any specific environmental factors that distract students and make appropriate environmental changes
- » have students work with a group that is highly task-focused
- » let students work in a study carrel or in a space that is “private” and uncluttered
- » designate a volunteer to help whenever students becomes distracted and/or start to misbehave, and if necessary, to help them make transitions
- » allow for frequent "breaks"
- » interact with students in ways that will minimize confusion and distractions (e.g., keep conversations relatively short; talk quietly and slowly; use concrete terms; express warmth and nurturance)

If students need more support and guidance, the following might be used:

- » develop and provide sets of specific prompts, multisensory cues, steps, etc. using oral, written, and perhaps pictorial and color-coded guides as organizational aids related to specific learning activities, materials, and daily schedules
- » ensure someone checks with students frequently throughout an activity to provide additional support and guidance in concrete ways (e.g., model, demonstrate, coach)
- » support student efforts related to self-monitoring and self-evaluation and provide nurturing feedback keyed to student progress and next steps

If students have difficulty finishing tasks as scheduled, try the following:

- » modify the length and time demands of assignments and tests
- » modify the nature of the process and products (e.g., allow use of technological tools and allow for oral, audio-visual, arts and crafts, graphic, and computer generated products)

Exhibit

504 ACCOMMODATION CHECKLIST

Various organizations concerned with special populations circulate lists of 504 accommodations. The following is one that was downloaded from website of a group concerned with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (see <http://www.come-over.to/FAS/IDEA504.htm>).

Physical Arrangement of Room

- seating student near the teacher
- seating student near a positive role model
- standing near student when giving directions/presenting lessons
- avoiding distracting stimuli (air conditioner, high traffic area)
- increasing distance between desks

Lesson Presentation

- pairing students to check work
- writing key points on the board
- providing peer tutoring
- providing visual aids, large print, films
- providing peer notetaker
- making sure directions are understood
- including a variety of activities during each lesson
- repeating directions to student after they are given to the class: then have him/her repeat and explain directions to teacher
- providing written outline
- allowing student to tape record lessons
- having child review key points orally
- teaching through multi-sensory modes, visual, auditory, kinesthetics, olfactory
- using computer-assisted instruction
- accompany oral directions with written directions for child to refer to blackboard or paper
- provide model to help students, post the model, refer to it often
- provide cross age peer tutoring
- to assist the student in finding the main idea underlying, highlighting, cue cards, etc.
- breaking longer presentations into shorter segments

Assignments/worksheets

- giving extra time to complete tasks
- simplifying complex directions
- handing worksheets out one at a time
- reducing the reading level of the assignments
- requiring fewer correct responses to achieve grade (quality vs. quantity)
- allowing student to tape record assignments/homework
- providing a structured routine in written form
- providing study skills training/learning strategies
- giving frequent short quizzes and avoiding long tests
- shortening assignments; breaking work into smaller segments
- allowing typewritten or computer printed assignments prepared by the student or dictated by the student and recorded by someone else if needed.
- using self-monitoring devices
- reducing homework assignments
- not grading handwriting
- student not be allowed to use cursive or manuscript writing
- reversals and transpositions of letters and numbers should not be marked wrong, reversals or transpositions should be pointed out for corrections

- do not require lengthy outside reading assignments
- teacher monitor students self-paced assignments (daily, weekly, bi-weekly)
- arrangements for homework assignments to reach home with clear, concise directions
- recognize and give credit for student's oral participation in class

Test Taking

- allowing open book exams
- giving exam orally
- giving take home tests
- using more objective items (fewer essay responses)
- allowing student to give test answers on tape recorder
- giving frequent short quizzes, not long exams
- allowing extra time for exam
- reading test item to student
- avoid placing student under pressure of time or competition

Organization

- providing peer assistance with organizational skills
- assigning volunteer homework buddy
- allowing student to have an extra set of books at home
- sending daily/weekly progress reports home
- developing a reward system for in-schoolwork and homework completion
- providing student with a homework assignment notebook

Behaviors

- use of timers to facilitate task completion
- structure transitional and unstructured times (recess, hallways, lunchroom, locker room, library, assembly, field trips, etc.)
- praising specific behaviors
- using self-monitoring strategies
- giving extra privileges and rewards
- keeping classroom rules simple and clear
- making "prudent use" of negative consequences
- allowing for short breaks between assignments
- cueing student to stay on task (nonverbal signal)
- marking student's correct answers, not his mistakes
- implementing a classroom behavior management system
- allowing student time out of seat to run errands, etc.
- ignoring inappropriate behaviors not drastically outside classroom limits
- allowing legitimate movement
- contracting with the student
- increasing the immediacy of rewards
- implementing time-out procedures