

# MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners  
Through Classroom Adaptations



MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

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Many of the ideas in this booklet were adapted from:

- *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs*
- *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*
- *Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Early Childhood Settings, and*
- *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education.*

Adaptations provided in this document are strictly examples, and are not only for children with disabilities, but any child who may be struggling with a skill. Use these adaptations as a basis for your own ideas to meet the specific needs of your children.

## Inclusion of **ALL** Children

Inclusion allows young children with and without disabilities to participate in the same community of learners. An inclusive prekindergarten program recognizes and addresses the diverse needs and interests of each child.

Any child has the potential to be a child “at-risk”, depending on the circumstances or the skill involved. High-quality programs provide differentiation for children’s varying needs.

Adaptations should be used to overcome barriers and help children learn. They should only be used as necessary and faded as appropriate as the child gains mastery.

## What Does a **HIGH-QUALITY** Early Childhood Program Look Like?

A high-quality early childhood program meets the requirements of the MDE Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Old Children, including principles of developmentally-appropriate practice based on child development and the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child. It has:

- ▶ Engaging interactions
- ▶ A responsive and predictive environment
- ▶ Many opportunities for learning
- ▶ Teaching matched to the individual child
- ▶ Developmentally-appropriate materials and activities
- ▶ Safe and hygienic practices
- ▶ Appropriate levels of guidance



# Teacher TIPS

## Process for Adapting Curriculum and Instruction

Use a thoughtful process for planning and using adaptations for activities. Consider:

- ▶ Your group of children and the learning experience, activity, or routine to be implemented.
- ▶ Goals for this activity. What do you want the children to learn, experience, or be engaged in and why?
- ▶ Instructional plans for this activity. How will this activity be implemented from beginning to end?
- ▶ Child(ren) that might need adaptations to succeed.
- ▶ Appropriate adaptations that will enable the child to participate and learn. Start with the most natural, least intrusive adaptations.
- ▶ How the child participates/performs in the activity and adjust adaptations as needed.

## TIP Using Child Preferences

When working with ALL children, it is important to identify child preferences to assist them in taking advantage of the many learning opportunities in the classroom. As you are making adaptations, consider the interests of each child in your class. By identifying and integrating his or her preferences, such as a favorite song or toy, more participation will result.



*I had a girl in my class who consistently played with the cars in the block area, so I moved the cars to the art area and let her roll the car wheels in paint.*

*Cameron loves magazines and would flip through them during free play, so I use the magazines as a teaching tool by finding objects, cutting pictures out with scissors and matching colors.*

## TIP Providing Visual Supports

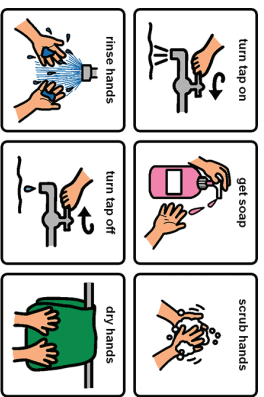
To support children that have language difficulties, those who need visual reminders, or those who are dual language learners, provide visual supports throughout the classroom. This may include picture schedules, picture cues for specific activities, and labels for classroom areas and materials. To meet a variety of children's needs, labels should include a picture, word(s) in English, and word(s) in other languages spoken by children in your class. Using visual supports in the classroom will promote early reading skills, as children associate pictures/items with the written word.



## TIP Using Picture Cues

Picture cues are great for use during daily routines and activities to teach a procedure.

► For hand washing:



► For instructions on how to paint:





## TIP Peer Support

The children in the class can be a big help to one another. A child can model how to do an activity or can be paired up to be a helper. Peers can also use praise and encouragement during difficult routines. By utilizing peers to help a child that is having difficulty learning important objectives, the peer is also learning about differences and acceptance.





## TIP Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines can help teachers design flexible lessons to meet the needs of all learners.

The principles of UDL provide for multiple means of:

- ▶ Engagement,
- ▶ Representation, and
- ▶ Action & Expression.

To learn more about UDL, go to

<http://ectacenter.org/topics/atech/udl.asp>.







## **TIP** Adapted Equipment

Some children with disabilities will need specialized equipment or an adaptive device in order to fully participate in the program. Commercial adapted equipment includes wheelchairs, walkers, adapted bicycles, switch toys, board maker programs, and augmentative communication devices.

To find out more information on accessing adapted equipment, ask the child's special education teacher/therapist or contact:

- ▶ Institute for Disability Studies: 1.888.671.0051
- ▶ Project Start: 1.800.852.8328
- ▶ T. K. Martin Center: 1.662.325.1028

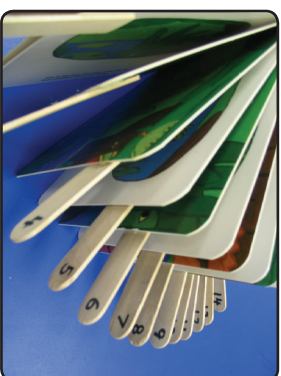


## TIP

### How to Adapt Books

If a child has difficulty turning the pages of a book, simply add popsicle sticks to each page or place raised adhesive dots or self-stick rubber pads in the upper right-hand corner.

These simple adaptations make the pages easier to lift and reading time becomes more independent.



## TIP Embedded Instruction

Teach skills within typical activities. Intentionally embed opportunities of practice and ongoing assessment throughout the day rather than having a child sit at a table completing worksheets. Take advantage of the child's interests during free play and routines. For example, if a child has trouble with counting:

- ▶ Provide manipulatives such as counting bears during free play.
- ▶ Provide books with pictures to count.
- ▶ Help the child count the fruit he is putting in the pot in dramatic play.
- ▶ Count popsicle sticks he glued onto his project during art.
- ▶ Count the steps it takes to reach the water fountain from your classroom.





# Adaptations by CLASSROOM AREA

## Process for Adapting Classroom Areas

Please keep in mind:

- ▶ These adaptations are not strictly limited to one area, with many being appropriate to use throughout the classroom.
- ▶ Adaptations should only be used as needed and faded when no longer necessary.

## Adaptations during ROUTINES

- ▶ During arrival, place a picture card in the child's cubby of the first task of the day (ex. picture of block area)
- ▶ Provide silly transition cues such as "walk sideways to the bathroom" or "skip to your next center".
- ▶ Tape construction-paper feet to the ground and cover with contact paper to assist with difficulties lining up.
- ▶ Give clear and simple instructions.
- ▶ Provide visual reminders in centers of how students should clean up before moving to another activity.
- ▶ Use a picture schedule with the daily routine.



## Adaptations during GROUP TIME

- ▶ Provide individual carpet squares to encourage children to keep their hands to themselves during circle time.
- ▶ Use tangible objects/puppets during circle time to make songs and books more meaningful and interesting.
- ▶ Use a flannel board with felt pieces that represent the story to help with engagement and comprehension.
- ▶ If a child is not able to answer open-ended questions independently, ask a peer for some suggestions of answers and let the child choose.
- ▶ Ask the assistant teacher to sit behind the child and provide hand-over-hand assistance for movement to songs.



## Adaptations in the WRITING CENTER

- ▶ Provide writing utensils that vary in size, shape, and color.
- ▶ Provide a variety of items to write on, such as manila paper, white paper (lined and unlined), textured papers such as wallpaper samples and card stock, a white board, or a chalk board.
- ▶ Allow children to “write” on a sealed zip-top bag filled with paint or on the table in shaving cream.



## Adaptations in the SAND/WATER CENTER

- ▶ For children with sensory sensitivities, provide a large zip-top bag filled with sand, water, or other items to give them a chance to participate without having to touch the actual items.
- ▶ Change the item in the sensory table periodically to provide the opportunity for different sensory input. Dried beans or rice are good items to try.
- ▶ For children who perseverate at the sand/water table, provide a timer that limits the amount of time that is spent there.





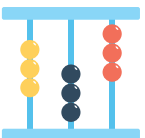
## Adaptations in the SCIENCE/DISCOVERY CENTER

- ▶ Provide a variety of sensory experiences, including things to touch, listen to, and smell.
- ▶ Put actual items in the center when possible, as some children need this to develop an understanding of concepts.
- ▶ To build connections between an item and its visual and printed representations, pair items with pictures and words.



## Adaptations in the MANIPULATIVE CENTER

- ▶ Add Velcro to puzzle pieces and make a Velcro band for the child's hand.
- ▶ Glue small blocks to puzzle pieces as handles.
- ▶ Draw a line down a sheet of plain white paper so when the child counts, he can simply move the object across the line to help with one-to-one correspondence.
- ▶ Provide pipe cleaners for stringing beads.
- ▶ Use copy paper box lids for a child's individual work space.



## Adaptations in the BLOCK CENTER

- ▶ Add Velcro to blocks (for children who have difficulty stacking).
- ▶ Provide a non-skid mat for tables.
- ▶ Use a tray for children to build blocks so the blocks stay contained.
- ▶ Include lightweight cardboard blocks.
- ▶ Provide blocks in various sizes and weights (for children who have difficulty lifting heavier blocks).

*\* To make cardboard blocks, stuff empty food boxes with newspaper, wrap them in wrapping paper, then cover with contact paper to avoid tearing.*



## Adaptations in the ART CENTER

- ▶ Put foam curlers on paintbrushes for easier grasp.
- ▶ Use tabletop easels to change angle of view for child.
- ▶ Stabilize paper with clothespins or tape.
- ▶ Stabilize materials with cookie tray/non-skid mat.
- ▶ Provide easy-to-grasp markers, crayons, and brushes (can add rubber bands if no allergies).
- ▶ Provide a marker stand to help keep up with marker tops.
- ▶ Provide adapted scissors.





## Adaptations in the DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

- ▶ Provide materials of various textures.
- ▶ Provide visual or auditory cues as needed (see “Tip: Using Picture Cues”).
- ▶ Use puppets to facilitate language development.
- ▶ Use Velcro instead of buttons for children who have difficulty fastening clothes.
- ▶ Add accessories such as hats, sunglasses, and purses for children who have difficulty with fasteners.



## Adaptations in the LIBRARY CENTER

- ▶ Add books with raised pictures and/or high-contrast colors.
- ▶ Use headphones and recorded stories.
- ▶ Adapt some books (See “Tip: How to Adapt Books”).
- ▶ Make books with photographs from field trips or pictures parents send from home to spark child's interest.
- ▶ Add new books to the center to maintain interest.
- ▶ Provide a variety of reading levels.



## Adaptations during OUTDOOR PLAY

- ▶ Build up the pedals on a tricycle with unit blocks (securely taped) for a child whose feet cannot reach the pedals.
- ▶ Provide alternative items for children who do not participate with gross motor equipment, such as easels and paint, musical instruments, or sidewalk chalk.
- ▶ Transport a non-mobile child to the playground in a wagon or riding toy.





# Adaptations by SPECIFIC NEED

## **Process for Adapting by Specific Need**


Please keep in mind:

- ▶ These adaptations are not strictly limited to children with disabilities and may benefit other children as well.
- ▶ Children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may have specific accommodations and/or modifications listed on their IEPs that must be provided. While those items are required, the child may benefit from other adaptations as well.






**Adaptations for Children with**  
**SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES**

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- ▶ Teach children to use a “break” card that can be given to the teacher when the child is feeling overwhelmed or needs to step away briefly.
  - ▶ Have a “safe place” or “soft zone” in your room for children to have a short time of quiet when they need it and teach children how and when to use it.
  - ▶ Provide direct instruction on appropriate interpersonal skills. Role-play with children in a small group, including children with various skill levels.
  - ▶ Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide children’s behavior.

## Adaptations for Children with LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

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- ▶ Listen attentively when a child speaks and respond to what the child says. It may be difficult at first but as you get to know the child it becomes easier.
  - ▶ Use names for objects, places and actions. Instead of saying, "Put it over there," say "Hang your bag on the hook."
  - ▶ Avoid speaking for the child; listen without interrupting him or her.
  - ▶ Ask the child open-ended questions instead of yes or no questions. Rather than asking "Are you painting?" ask "What are you doing?"
  - ▶ Use gestures along with spoken words when giving directions.
  - ▶ Repeat what the child says so he or she knows that you understand him or her. For instance, if a child says, "want paint," say "You want to paint" and then give them the paint.



## Adaptations for Children with PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- ▶ Arrange indoor and outdoor play areas so all children using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches can easily pass through.
- ▶ Be sure tables are the correct height. If a wheelchair needs to fit beneath, tables may need to be taller.
- ▶ Make sure chairs are the correct height. Feet should be supported on the floor or step stool.
- ▶ Ask parents or therapists about specialized adaptive seating or positioning devices such as standing tables or wedges.
- ▶ Place materials where they can be reached from any position.
- ▶ Provide materials that are easier to grasp and hold (ex. large cars and trucks, puzzles with knobs, big paint brushes).

## Adaptations for Children with PHYSICAL DISABILITIES *(continued)*

- ▶ Ask about adaptive equipment such as switch toys or computers.
- ▶ Be aware that unexpected touching may startle some children with physical disabilities. Let the child know you are going to touch, handle or move him or her.



## Adaptations for Children with AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

(These adaptations may also be helpful for children with language difficulties.)

- ▶ Establish a consistent routine.
- ▶ Verbally review the daily schedule. Provide picture cues as reminders.
- ▶ Provide visual cues in addition to auditory cues. For example, create picture choice cards.
- ▶ Use augmentative communication (sign language, communication boards) as recommended by parents and therapists.
- ▶ Rehearse difficult situations verbally. Explain what the class will be doing and what his or her role may be.

## Adaptations for Children with AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER *(continued)*

- ▶ Warn of transitions in advance. Provide visual cues such as a ball for outdoor play or a book for circle time.
- ▶ Accept non-speech communication. Watch for eye-gazing (looking toward or away from an item), body language or facial expressions. Listen to the child's behavior.
- ▶ Use simple, clear language. Directions should be simple, concrete and carefully defined.

## Adaptations for Children with VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- ▶ Maintain consistent room arrangement.
- ▶ Add tactile cues to anything you would otherwise label with a picture.
- ▶ Describe or provide hand-over-hand assistance with tasks requiring a visual model.
- ▶ Provide high contrast materials (ex. a piece of light paper as a background to colored cars or trucks).
- ▶ Show child how to explore the physical characteristics of toys.
- ▶ Describe the parts of an object and how it works. Use the actual objects when talking about them.
- ▶ Some children can transition more easily if they have an object to hold (ex. let a child carry the sandbox shovel to outside time or a finger cymbal to music). This will help reduce fear of the unknown.





## Adaptations for Children with DEAF OR HEARING IMPAIRMENT

- ▶ Use total communication (gestures, pictures, demonstration and language).
- ▶ Use sign language (if the child is being instructed in this manner in other settings).
- ▶ Teach sign language to peers and other personnel (again, if the child is being instructed in this manner in other settings).
- ▶ Use many gestures and modeling.
- ▶ Use picture cues and as many other visual aids as possible.
- ▶ Signal transitions visually (ex. flicker the lights in the room).
- ▶ Avoid standing with your back to the light source. This makes your face and hands very hard to see.

## Adaptations for Children with DEAF OR HEARING IMPAIRMENT *(continued)*

- ▶ Be sure to get the child's attention before communicating with him or her. However, avoid taking the child's face and turning it toward you since this is typically deemed invasive and inappropriate.
- ▶ Social interactions with peers may be difficult, so help the child be aware that other children are talking to him or her.
- ▶ Teach the other children how to get the child's attention appropriately.

## Adaptations for Children with

### ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD/ADHD)

- ▶ Be sure to have the child's attention before talking to him or her.
- ▶ Use simple, clear language. Directions should be simple, concrete and carefully defined.
- ▶ Avoid long periods of sitting. Children should be actively engaged in learning centers.
- ▶ Start and finish learning tasks with success. Sometimes children spend less time on tasks that are difficult for them. Embed these more difficult skills within tasks that children succeed at and enjoy.
- ▶ Establish a consistent routine.
- ▶ Provide clear expectations.

## Adaptations for Children with

### ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD/ADHD) *(continued)*

- ▶ Verbally review the daily schedule. Provide picture cues as reminders.
- ▶ Plan many short activities or multiple components to a long activity, with clear starting and stopping points.
- ▶ Limit the type and number of new situations encountered at one time.
- ▶ Embed learning time into transitions. Limit the amount of waiting time.



## Adaptations for Children with COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS

- ▶ Use explicit instruction. Show and tell children what to do or think while solving problems.
- ▶ Keep verbal directions simple. Use gestures to help the child understand what is expected.
- ▶ Allow the child an extra try (or more) to succeed at a skill, as he/she may need additional repetitions of instruction and practice.
- ▶ Arrange the environment so the child can focus on the activity, such as clearing the table of materials or using a copy paper box lid to keep materials in a confined, focused space.
- ▶ Provide visual supports as needed.
- ▶ Give the child advanced warning about activity changes and be consistent during transitions.

## Adaptations for Children with COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS *(continued)*

- ▶ Break tasks into small parts and allow the child to learn one part at a time.
- ▶ Alternate activities between quiet and active, free play and teacher-directed to help with attention span.
- ▶ Consistently reward the child with praise for his or her efforts.
- ▶ Increase your wait time when asking questions to give the child more time to process.





**Adaptations for Children who are**  
**DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

- ▶ Use both monolingual and bilingual books for the languages of the children in the classroom (including fiction and non-fiction audio books).
- ▶ Label items in the room in all languages used by children in the classroom.
- ▶ Use music in different languages.
- ▶ Try learning 10-20 key words/phrases in the child's home language to help them feel welcome, safe, and comfortable.
- ▶ Make use of a picture communication board and/or cards on an O-ring for needs or feelings.
- ▶ In math, build connections for what children already know for examples of counting, comparing quantities, ordering objects, creating and identifying patterns, identifying and comparing shapes, measuring, and sorting.