

Teaching Students With Learning Disabilities

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All of us will encounter students with learning disabilities at some time in our careers. Examples of learning disabilities include dyslexia and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Each disability needs to be treated differently and on an individual basis. You will see varying degrees of each disability. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which congress passed in 1990, you have to accommodate them to a reasonable degree.

If you are at a school with a Vocational Resource Educator (VRE), use his/her resources. He/she is trained to work with students with disabilities. You will need to coordinate your needs with the VRE person, as they may have several students in the same building that they are working with. If you do not have a VRE person available, several things can be done to accommodate each persons needs.

Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities. About 10% of Americans suffer from this disability. It is a neurological condition that affects a person's ability to read, write, spell and concentrate. For the dyslexic person, you may have to read their tests to them and have them tell you what they are writing down. It may take them longer to do in-class assignments. If you are working in groups, have the dyslexic person be the spokesperson. The dyslexic person will usually excel in the laboratory setting where they can demonstrate their skills. There will be very little reading and writing.

Another common problem among adults is ADHD. This has gone undiagnosed in the adult population for many years. Only in the last several years has this disorder been in the spotlight for the adult learner. You will find students inattentive and restless. The student will find it hard to concentrate on a task for any length of time. The best way

to deal with this student is to keep him/her busy. The student will not do well listening to a lecture. If the room is large enough, have the student stay in the back of the room. Here he/she can stand, sit, move around, play with an instrument, etc. The student needs to constantly have something to do. When taking a test, the student may be tapping his/her feet or hitting their pencil on the table. Try to put this student in the back of the room where they will not disturb another person. When working in groups, this person should take a very active role in the work. When you need to hand papers back to the class, or send something to the office, have your student who is ADHD do it. Give him/her a time frame to do the task so that they do not get sidetracked and remain focused. Remember the ADHD student needs to keep his/her mind and body occupied at all times.

These are two of the most common learning disabilities that you should encounter. Each person will be different. Most will need more one-on-one attention than the rest of the class. This will require you to do more planning and communication with other personnel so that you can have help at test time.