



Identifying a Special Need

Almost everyone has a special need at some time in their life, whether it is related to emotional, physical, or learning situations. But it doesn't necessarily mean that special help should be sought. Many of these needs can be transitory, while others may have more lasting effects. It is sometimes hard to tell if there is a difficulty of which you, as a teacher, should be taking more notice. These questions are designed to help you establish whether or not there is a special need.

- 1. Can you describe the problem?** Try to write down as many things as you can that describe the way a problem manifests itself, and in what situations and at what times it comes to light. If you can pinpoint details like these, you can build strategies around this information that will help you and the child in the short term, and perhaps the long term.
- 2. How long have you been aware of it?** If you know that it has been in the back of your mind for a while, write down some facts and discuss this with your director and parents. Have a conversation about these facts with teachers who have had this child in the past. Keep a record of the situation, so that you feel you are doing something positive.
- 3. Has it just become more obvious?** Can you specify a particular time when it began, or when it became significantly worse? Has someone mentioned it to you, and if so what triggered the awareness? Try to identify other events that happened about the time when you became aware; do you think they could be connected? Remember that by identifying issues, you are already helping to find a solution.
- 4. Is the child aware of it?** Has the child commented about the situation and, if so, have they seen it as a problem or just as a feature of their everyday life? If they see it as a problem, reassure them that you have listened and will think about what should be done. If they talk about it as everyday life, then don't draw any more attention to it for now, but keep an eye on how often they refer to it and how they say it affects them when they are playing, and so on.
- 5. Do other children in the class have similar problems?** If other children have similar problems, which have recently come to light, it may be something specific that should be looked at in the classroom. If children have come to you, as a teacher, with problems that seem to be related, it may be linked to a subject in a specific area that you will need to talk to the director about.
- 6. Have you tried talking to the child about it?** It can be reassuring to a child to learn that they are not the only ones having problems. Discuss this with the child, and see if they can tell you why other children cope better. Even if it is a small detail they tell you, it may give both of you a positive idea to try out.
- 7. Does the difficulty actually limit the progress of the child?** Can you measure this? Has there been a significant change in the child's developmental milestones or behavior?
- 8. Is there a difference between the child's verbal communication and written or creative work?** Try to figure out why the child can put something into words, but not express it on a piece of paper. If you can see a difference in the two, try to list the good points that helped the child achieve success and progress in the past, so that you can suggest these as positive ways forward now.
- 9. Will it cure itself?** This probably depends on what brought it about in the first place. There could be danger in thinking it is just a phase the child is going through, because you set no time limit on when it should end. A problem, once identified, should be monitored, in case it flares up again or gets worse.
- 10. How long will it take to see improvement?** Try to have time limits in mind as a trigger for your next course of action. However, ensure that they are reasonable. For example, one week is too short for any change to be noticeable. One month is probably more realistic, while 3 months gives more time for a full evaluation of the problem in your mind and any observation that needs to be taken.



Identifying Children with Attention Deficit Disorder

You may find it helpful to identify children with ADD by the following questions. If you can identify at least seven of these as present in the child's behavior over a period of six months, then you should speak to your director. Make note of the occasions when they displayed these characteristics and talk to the director about them.

1. Does the child fidget, squirm or seem restless?
2. Does the child move from one incomplete task to another?
3. Does the child have difficulty sitting in one place?
4. Is the child easily distracted?
5. Does the child talk excessively?
6. Does the child have difficulty in waiting for turn for attention?
7. Does the child fail to listen for instructions or what others say?
8. Does the child find it impossible to follow what needs to be done?
9. Does the child often lose equipment for a task or forget to bring it in?
10. Does the child find it hard to play quietly and sensibly?

Tips for working with children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):

1. Keep the child safe. If a child is fidgety to the extent that they become involved in dangerous actions, you will need to take appropriate action. This is often because they do not think through the consequences. Try to avoid putting the child near any stimuli which, in themselves, can prove dangerous; for example, some types of windows, sockets and cables, or other children who have behavioral problems.
2. Recognize achievements. Be sure to praise the child for ignoring situations that stimulate their behavioral issues and to encourage the child to help monitor how well they did.
3. Help the child to be patient in waiting in turns. Let them know that you have noticed them, so that frustration does not cause them to lose self-control.
4. Establish supervision and discipline into the child's routine. If you impose a calm, measured approach in your teaching, which is consistent, children can learn from your routine.
5. Establish with the child the notion of what constitutes completed activities if the child fails to finish work. They may not recognize when they have properly completed an activity, rather than just abandoned it. A record book or chart of their completed activities may be motivation to the child.
6. Encourage the child to ask for assistance so that they don't simply move along because they are stuck or frustrated with an activity.
7. Help them to establish the habit of playing quietly. You should start off by asking the child to play quietly for ten to fifteen minutes until they establish a routine. This will help the child notice that loud noises and action may stimulate hyperactive behavior.
8. Modify the child's activities so that they are able to work independently using their strengths.
9. Check back with the child regularly to see that they have been listening if the child seems not to listen to what is said. Call on them to repeat the instructions and points at regular intervals to keep them focused. Let them know that you will be doing this, but don't stress the child by giving them unrealistic expectations.
10. Keep an organized classroom. The child with ADHD often loses classroom items, or leaves items behind, claims that others have taken them, and so on. If you provide the basics in an ordered way, this teaches them a system they can adopt elsewhere. It also creates the sense that everything is in its correct place, and promotes an ordered existence to which they can respond.



Autistic Spectrum Disorder

This term applies to a range of language and communication disorders which overlap. Language development or non-verbal behaviors may be disproportionately impaired from one child to another. Remember that Autism should not be seen as a label, but as a signpost directing you to meeting the child's needs and full psychological and medical advice should be sought. Below are tips for recognizing autism.

1. Does the child have difficulty relating to people?
2. Does the child have difficulty interpreting speech and actions?
3. Does the child have difficulty in responding to events or objects in the environment?
4. Does the child perform repetitive and stereotyped actions?
5. Does the child have difficulty with speech?
6. Does the child demonstrate a strong desire to keep things the same?
7. Does the child have a good memory, particularly for role learning?
8. Does the child have good cognitive potential?
9. Does the child have a weak sense of finish?
10. Does the child have good coordination when handling objects?