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## Classroom management strategies for children with special needs

**Manoj Kumar and Jyoti Kaushik**

### Abstract

All teachers want to provide children with special needs a classroom environment where the child can meet his or her learning needs. But always the problem behavior of children and the limitations of the classroom have created obstacles in this process. Due to this barrier free classroom environment could not be developed and created in most of the schools. To manage the problematic behavior of children and provide them a good learning environment, teachers have to face many challenges, But after the use of effective classroom management strategies such as audio-visual aids, accessible classroom infrastructure and classroom arrangements, it has been observed that the classrooms have become more accessible and effective for children with special needs, Which has benefited both teachers and students.

**Keywords:** Children with special needs, limitations, problematic behavior, audio-visual aids, accessible, infrastructure, classroom arrangements

### Introduction

When you work with children with special needs in education or Special Education, you face many challenging situations like managing a classroom with a variety of special needs. Often those behaviors can be distracting and frustrating to both teachers and other students. You probably won't be surprised to learn that on average, a lot of instructional time is lost in classrooms due to behavioral disruptions. To be effective, special education teachers must master classroom behavior management. Students with disabilities have a lot of unique needs, so it is essential to have a full list of strategies to meet and manage their needs. The majority of students who qualify nationally for special education have abundant needs. Do you ever feel like you don't have all the strategies you need to handle your class of unique students? You're not alone. In fact, a large percentage of new teachers say they feel unprepared to manage behavior in their special education classroom. If you need some help managing classroom behavior, read on for some tips and strategies you can use in your special education classroom.

### Classroom Management Strategies

Get assistance from assistive technology programs to focus the interest of children with autism spectrum disorder. Stages Learning Line is an indispensable tool while dealing with students of autism spectrum disorder. This platform is such a revolutionary idea including visual learning and assessment tool for professionals and educators working with young children with autism spectrum. This tool incorporates thousands of pictures and worksheets or exercises designed by a certified behavior analyst or evaluator. In this particular tool, there is an option that one can also use their own images to personalize lesson plans for children who have specific interests. One standardized platform allows teachers to create effective, customized lesson plans that can be shared with other students and teachers who may share the same interests. The products preceding Stages Learning Line have been researched and implemented in schools around the world and have shown to be efficient learning tools for training students with autism. 2. Following Seating arrangement.

The arrangement of your special education children in the class matters a lot because children with autism need their own space. As we all know kids with autism and ADHD get distracted easily, so arranging the tables and chairs in rows rather than a circle works best. Moreover, keeping the chairs away from windows and doors is recommended to prevent children from getting distracted. This will help them concentrate and focus.

Post classroom rules for effective execution of tactics, the main focus of the educators is on reviewing the children regularly. Ask students to take turns reading the rules aloud as part of the daily routine. Make sure all students acknowledge the rules of the classroom and the consequences for not adhering to them. It may be helpful to allow the class to help formulate the classroom rules.

Keep everything simple. Give verbal prompts frequently, and always have assurance that your instructions are easy to understand. Repeat those instructions if the student does not seem to comprehend what you are saying.

**Assist through visual aids:** Visual aids can be more productive such as charts, graphs, pictures, and flashcards. The Stages Learning Line computer program consists of colorful, animated pictures that will necessarily please the special needs children. Children with autism tend to respond well to technology. Stages Learning Line is very appealing to them and allows them to be interactive while learning.

**Peers would be wonderful role models:** They play an important role for students with autism spectrum disorder. Compatible pairing of children together when working on projects or participating in classroom activities. Most of the children welcome the opportunity to be a peer role model to the special needs student. The experience is not only positive for the student with autism but for the peer counsellor as well.

**Follow a visual schedule:** An autism visual schedule is a supportive tool that's frequently used to assist children in completing daily tasks and participating in daily activities. Examples of visual schedules you may use are morning: breakfast, get dressed, brush teeth, backpack, etc. Evening: homework, TV time, dinner, bath, bed time, etc. School: circle time, free play, story, snack, recess, craft, gym, back to home, etc. Weekend: quiet play, game, lunch, park, grandma's house, home, dinner etc.

Teach social etiquette or skills, such as hand raising, taking turns and communication, sharing, greeting, etc. as part of the learning curriculum. All students will benefit when reminders are given. Etiquettes can be taught while following the same.

Providing them a chance to take a break. Read a story, play a short game, stand up and stretch, or have a casual conversation. Sometimes an opportunity to get out of his seat and walk around from the room can be very calming for a child with an autism spectrum. Try to be aware of the signs that your student may need a short break.

Focus on student strengths. If a child is interested in dinosaurs, baseball, dogs or water sports, he or she needs the opportunity to exhibit expertise in that subject. Stages Learning Line was developed with the personalized lesson plan in mind. Students with autism feel good when they are studying a lesson plan that was prepared specifically for them.

### **Positive Experience All Around**

Teaching students with autism is a tough task but the experience can be a positive one for the autistic child, his teachers, and his classmates if the proper teaching tactics are incorporated into the daily routine. Autistic children struggle with socialization, communication, etc. The Stages Learning Line computer-based program opens a world of

wonders for each student who is attending the class. The autistic student can work independently and can feel a sense of pride while mastering skills and learning new concepts. The program makes it possible to focus on the things that appeal to the student. Teachers are influenced as they watch in wonder as their students with autism improve their verbal skills as they progress through the program at their own speed.

Stages Learning Line helps teachers improve the effectiveness of their teaching. Parents are overjoyed when they attend parent-teacher conferences and hear about the positive achievements being made in their child's education. The combination of classroom management strategies and the Stages Learning Line program can help teachers create a conducive learning environment that is productive and enthusiastic for academic discourse.

### **Classroom Management Strategies for Children with Special Needs**

Following are some useful strategies that can help children with exceptional needs in their growth and development:

#### **By using digital learning programs**

Special needs children, including those with ADHD especially, get easily distracted. With the use of digital learning programs one can be benefitted. It can keep them engaged and hold their attention over a significant period of time. These engagements through programs teach students things like counting, colors, the alphabet, etc., with visual imagery that appeals to their senses.

For personalizing the learning experience teachers can go a step ahead and customize lessons based on a child's interests or learning style. Special education teaching is personalized or individualized; it does not have to be standardized for everyone. Children should be given an ample amount of time to learn at their own pace in their own way.

#### **Explain clearly with verbal prompts**

If the students don't understand you at first, repeat what you are saying again, more clearly. Verbal prompts should be used frequently to improving comprehension.

Providing a noise-free environment for children with special needs these teachers must ensure a clean and noise-free environment that is conducive. Environmental triggers like too-bright or too-dim lights, loud noises, poor air quality, or abnormal temperatures can distract students and render them less likely to participate in class activities.

### **Classroom management techniques for conducive environment in special needs education**

#### **1. Silent areas**

Helpful to have a space set aside where distressed children can go, somewhere separate from the noise, hustle and bustle of the regular classroom. This will provide the child an opportunity to recover and self-regulate without disrupting others. Soft lighting, comfortable furniture and smooth toys provide sensory stimulation and contribute to creating a safe and reassuring area.

#### **2. Lighting**

Lighting is a needful consideration specifically. Children with visual impairments benefit from brighter lights, while some children with autism or who have other sensory issues

may need the dimming lights to prevent overstimulation. What will work best will depend on your students, because each of them has different requirements, so just ensuring the best may help.

The level of disruption that pupils can tolerate may fluctuate. Some students with special needs may find any sound distracting. Others may find gentle ambient music or light noise soothing. Some children are naturally loud and expressive, others may be soft-spoken or non-verbal. You are required to be able to balance those needs either by assessing them or following some creative techniques.

### **Sensory Stimulation**

Many children with special needs benefit from additional sensory stimulation. Being able to engage all of their senses makes it easier for them to focus and reduces the risk of outbursts. Use colour, music and different forms of media to improve engagement. Objects with different textures that children can manipulate in their hands can be a valuable distraction for those who struggle to pay attention.

### **Furniture**

The type and placement of furniture become even more important when teaching children with special needs. This could include adjusting the height of chairs, fixing desks in place, or using assistive devices such as slanting boards. Not only will this help children with physical disabilities, but it also reduces the risk of injury if children have to display challenging behaviour.

### **Mentoring**

As part of successful special needs education, each child must get the kind of individualized support that recognizes and celebrates their specific challenges and strengths. While smaller class sizes are beneficial, they also require a teacher to spend more time with each student individually. The support of teaching assistants and other additional staff, as well as peer mentoring and buddy systems between students, can all help to ensure no child feels left behind. These are just some of the ways that teachers may want to manage their classrooms when they teach children with learning difficulties, autism, developmental delays or other physical or cognitive disabilities. Successful tactics will make students feel more at ease, lower the danger of disruption, and make it simpler for them to concentrate and enjoy their sessions.

### **Establish Relationships with Students**

Let's face it, you spend a whole lot of time with your students over the course of a year. Often you spend more face to face time with them than their parents or guardians. Of all the research-based strategies available to you, one of the most important is developing a real relationship with your students.

They need to believe that you are invested in them and that you know them. It goes beyond smiling and welcoming them, although important. You need to find a way to make a connection with every student.

They won't always make it easy either. If they come from a home where they don't have positive relationships with adults, they will be wary. Work to get to know their interests, their love languages, learn about their life outside of school. Attempt to teach them about real conversations. Why do quality relationships matter? Because when there

are inevitable behavior issues that arise, you have goodwill and a student who is invested in a positive way with you. They are less likely to misbehave or less likely to want to give you a difficult time because you have this strong relationship.

### **Positive Learning Environment**

As a teacher, you know you need to pay attention to a student's intellectual, emotional, physical, and social needs. You need to set up your special education classroom that aims to meet the needs of each and every student in your room.

Establishing a positive learning environment where the focus is on both learning and positives will go a long way in curbing student behaviors. If they know, as students, that you will meet their needs and remain positive, they will be less likely to show you those negative behaviors.

Of course, you have to have a classroom with good procedures and expectations (more on this later) so students already understand how the classroom will function.

In a special education classroom, students will want to know you are there to support their learning and will help them when the learning is challenging for them. You create accommodations and scaffolds to help them learn like a student without a disability.

### **Set Expectations**

Students understand schools have rules. As a teacher, you want to let your students know about your expectations.

There are a few students, who by nature, are rule followers. But many who are not rule followers, and some of them with disabilities, will also test those expectations.

The more you can establish expectations with your students about how your classroom operates, the more likely students will be to follow them. How do you establish those expectations?

You need to have clear and concise communication with students, routine, and practice. Students know what things bother them in the classroom. Establish routine and practice routines. Create and post anchor charts that give students information about the things they need to know.

Talk together as a class to establish norms of behavior that you all agree to abide by. When they are invested in creating those norms, they are much more likely to follow them.

### **Organize Your Lessons**

No matter your age, you can recall sitting in a classroom or meeting where you are bored. You know those times when you don't care about what's being said to you, and you want to lean over to the person next to you in the meeting and start talking about your vacation plans.

This happens when you aren't engaged in what's happening around you. Teachers need to focus on thoughtful and deliberate lesson design so kids stay engaged in what is being taught. The higher the engagement in the learning, the less likely there will be behavior issues.

As special education teachers, you know part of that lesson design includes how you will accommodate and structure lessons for individual learners. What changes in lessons will you need so all students in your room can learn based on the goals of their IEP?

Students need to know the objectives of your lesson and what you expect them to learn. They need to have opportunities for practice and multiple checks for

understanding. These are all engagement strategies for students that keep them focused on the lesson and not on negative behaviors.

### **Focus on Strengths**

Sometimes when a student is being particularly difficult, it's easy to forget that everyone is good at something. Students forget this too, especially if they struggle with academic work in school. Often educators see students misbehaving as a coping mechanism for when they don't understand what school wants them to learn.

It's so important for both special education teachers and students to remember that everyone is good at something. And if you are struggling with a student, you need to focus on their strengths. This is also where having a relationship with them comes into play. You have learned about the student and can find those strengths.

Many special education students also have behavior intervention plans to help them modulate their behavior. Use student strengths (and interests) to build those behavior plans so they will be more effective in curbing unwanted behaviors.

As you focus on strengths, you can use those to engage students too.

### **Behavior Specific Praise**

You will be hard-pressed to find a student who doesn't respond to a positive. They might not always know how to react to praise, but they still like it.

Instead of focusing on the negatives that might be happening in your classroom (and this can be challenging, for sure), focus on the positives.

For many kids, the more responses and reactions they get from you for negative behaviors, the more negative behaviors they will give you. Inversely, the more positive reactions they get from you, the more positive behaviors you should see.

Having said that, your praise can't be generic. Make the praise specific to the behavior you want to see. Use language to communicate specifically the behavior you wish to see.

### **Greet Students at the Door**

Don't underestimate the huge impact a greeting can have. When you are at the door of your classroom, offer students an enthusiastic, sincere greeting. When you greet them individually, it does several important things.

You help set the tone for how the class will go. You have established a positive interaction. One study suggests that greeting students at the door can get you a 20% boost in student engagement. This is a pretty big boost for being at the door with a friendly and personalized greeting.

The other value is that you can get a gauge almost right away for how a student is feeling. You see their face and interact personally with them. As you get to know your students, you will know right away if they are having an off day and can be prepared for it. You can also use their specific social strategies to counteract a potential problem right at the beginning of the day.

### **Reminders and Cues**

Students respond to reminders and cues. It's important to let students know what you want them to do and how. If students aren't sure what to do, they will do what they want

or perhaps do something they shouldn't do. If students are finishing their math, for example, and wondering what to do next, you can verbally give a reminder for everyone to hear. You could also use specific praise that will work as a reminder for other students. For example, you can thank a student by name for putting their math assignment in the tray and getting started on their independent reading. That way, the student got praise for their work, and the others got a reminder.

Cues can be important too. You can even use these in behavior plans. Perhaps it's something as simple as placing a post-it note on a student's desk to let them know they are doing something they shouldn't be doing.

Also, use student behavior plans to establish what cues will work best with individual students.

When you make eye contact with students you can use nonverbal cues to remind them what they should be doing (or not doing).

### **Active Supervision**

Gone are the days in education where the teacher sits behind a desk facing students who quietly work (and behave), while the teacher grades papers. Students need to see you actively involved in what's happening in the special education classroom.

Proximity is very effective in addressing potential negative behaviors. Maybe students are working on something quietly. Instead of sitting behind your desk, go sit next to or near a student. You can monitor what they are doing and your presence helps prevent negative behaviors from happening.

Students will quickly get used to seeing you moving around the room. You can answer questions as you move around. You can answer questions and have small, quiet conferences with students. As you talk quietly with one student, the students around you benefit from hearing those conversations too.

Don't think of this as you watching them, looking for unwanted behaviors. Instead, approach it positively, as a way to interact about what they are working on.

### **Ignore**

Several people might think that ignoring bad behaviors is a bad strategy. However, it can be an efficacious strategy when ignoring is done intentionally.

(If you have a behavior that is causing problems from a particular student in the classroom, instead of continually addressing it, try to ignore it. Then give the student positive feedback for other things and all the cues and reminders.

Recognize the students around the non-compliant student who are doing the things you want them to do.

It will be challenging to ignore, there's no doubt. But when the student realizes they might not get the feedback or reaction they were trying for, eventually it's likely they will comply and do what is asked of them.)

### **Optimize Your Seating Plan**

As a teacher, you know that if you let your students select their seats, then they might make mistakes. Yet, the more independence you give students in the self-contained special classrooms, the more likely they will adhere.

You use any seating area with that goal in mind that you might feel comfortable there and that seating area will work as a reward area to you. You might let students who are

working in a group select where they sit. If they are doing anything mischievous, then you will ask them to go back to a separate desk, as a result they will work even harder to maintain appropriate behaviors.

There are some kids who need separate seating because they find it more helpful. There is a necessity for it in their life because it provides them a place to work with fewer distractions or stimuli.

As teachers, you need to make conscious decisions about where and how students select to sit and locate themselves.

### Conclusion

Special children can perform much better if certain strategies which are described above are followed while setting up the classrooms. Hence the educators attending the special students must be vigilant in executing such strategies that help children achieve better both academically and socially. It is not enough for a teacher to know classroom management strategies. If classroom management is to be used, these strategies must also be implemented effectively. As we all know children with special needs face many problems in learning due to their problematic behavior, these problems can be solved and their behaviour can be managed if teachers implement effective classroom management strategies for children with special needs in their classroom.

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