A Comprehensive Early Literacy Program

Adaptations for Children with Special Needs
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Introduction

Most early childhood classrooms include children with developmental delays or disabilities, whether or not they have been formally diagnosed. Research shows that children with such special needs benefit from attending programs like Opening the World of Learning (OWL), along with typically developing children. Teachers in inclusion classrooms must adapt the OWL program to help children with special education needs get the most from their preschool experience. Many of these adaptations are helpful, though not essential, for all children in the classroom.

Individualized Education Plans

Some children in your classroom may have been evaluated by staff from the local school district and have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Be sure to refer to a child’s IEP to identify specific goals and objectives. Most IEP goals can be met in a preschool classroom. For some children, however, meeting goals requires additional help from speech and language, occupational, or physical therapy specialists.

Developmental Delays and Disabilities

The suggested adaptations in this booklet are grouped by the OWL lessons and activities that make up the school day. In the following pages, you will find a variety of strategies to support children with language, social, cognitive, motor, sensory, attention, and behavioral difficulties. These strategies are appropriate for children with mild to moderate special needs. Children with more significant disabilities require a team of specialists.

Language and Cognitive Delays

Language delays often become apparent when children are three or four years old, because language is developing rapidly at this age. In the classroom, children with language delays may speak in single words or phrases rather than full sentences. They may have limited vocabulary, fail to follow directions, and lose attention quickly when listening to a book or a discussion.

Children with cognitive delays may not yet be diagnosed. These children typically have a hard time remembering concepts. A child may successfully count to five one day and then have to relearn this skill completely the next day. Often children with cognitive delays are unable to apply a new skill in a new setting.

Autism

Children with autism may be mildly to severely affected. However, all children on the autism spectrum have some distinct characteristics. They include social aloofness or awkwardness, difficulties processing language, a need for sameness, anxiety (especially in the face of change), and strong interest in unusual topics. Many children with autism also have excellent memory, strong visual skills, and the ability to learn the names of letters and numbers quickly. Some children with autism develop reading skills quite early.

Behavior Problems

Children’s difficult behavior is often a symptom, rather than the primary problem. It’s important to explore all possible causes of problem behavior before drawing up a behavior plan. For instance, a child frustrated by limited oral language ability may act aggressively when faced with conflict. A child with autism may have a temper tantrum because a change in the schedule made him or her extremely anxious. Still other children are so sensitive that they perceive even a light touch as pain. These children may become angry and lash out if others brush against them while standing in line or sitting at a workstation.

The Family Connection

Families are a key part of any early childhood program. Frequent communication with families of children with delays or learning disabilities is crucial. With these families, especially, teachers must form a true partnership. It is important to help parents and caregivers understand children’s strengths, abilities, and special needs. This may require more frequent meetings than with other parents and effective two-way communications, with honest sharing of information.
General Classroom Suggestions

Children with developmental disabilities are best served by teaching strategies that make learning goals explicit and obvious. The strategies you choose will depend on each child’s specific needs. Here are some adaptations that apply throughout the OWL curriculum.

- **Speak slowly.** It is important that teachers read and talk to children at a somewhat slower pace than they use in adult conversation. For children who have trouble processing what they hear, a slower pace for reading and speaking is essential. Just speak a little more slowly than normal and pronounce words very clearly without sounding artificial.

- **Make things visual.** The OWL curriculum uses a variety of materials and modes—books, posters, pictures, songs, poems, actions, objects—to help children understand language. However, you might need to use additional visual aids for some children. For example, a child may not understand that name cards on cubbies or lockers mean that each cubby or locker belongs to one individual. Placing a small photo next to each name label may help.

Some children may need visual aids to understand and feel secure about the daily routine. Create a visual that represents the daily schedule. For example, take photos of children doing the activities during each segment of the day. Label them. Arrange these photos in the order of the daily schedule (first item at the top or on the left). Place the schedule on a wall or on the back of a door, at children’s eye level. Then review the schedule with all the children each day for the first few weeks of school. After that, refer to the schedule as appropriate, helping children use the pictures and labels to identify what they will do next.

You can also make a card with a big question mark on it. Label it the SURPRISE! card. When the typical daily schedule must change to accommodate some special event, put the “?” card into the schedule list. This will help children who have a low tolerance for change, because they’ll get used to the SURPRISE! card as part of a routine. Review the schedule with individual children and with the group, perhaps at Morning Meeting.

Familiarize yourself with the OWL Envision It! Learning Strips. They provide valuable visual support for classroom routines.

- **Make your space work for you.** Try to offer suitable seating for whole group activities. Many children find it comfortable to sit on the floor on rug squares. (You can label the squares with children’s names.) If no chairs are available, certain children will benefit from a teacher sitting behind them so that they can lean against an adult for support. Plan the seating arrangement, taking into consideration, which children should sit near one another, and which children need the most adult support.

A preplanned seating arrangement can minimize distractions. Children who are impulsive or easily distracted often attend better when an adult is nearby. Some children do best when seated opposite the teacher in a circle. Others respond well when seated nearer the teacher. Experiment to see which arrangements work best.

- **Use technology.** Children with special needs often have proficient technology skills and are drawn to computers and other technological devices. Therefore, technology is a powerful tool to use to assist children with developmental delays or disabilities. The OWL Interactive Big Books offer text-to-audio highlighting, which helps children focus more effectively as they listen to a book and track the print. Children with physical disabilities benefit as well, as they can turn pages with minimal dexterity. The OWL Sing Along Songs and Poems CD provides music and poetry, which are particularly beneficial for children with special needs. The repetition and rhyme help build language and enhance communication. The OWL Concept Development Slide Shows and the Envision It! Animations aid children with cognitive and language delays, while the AudioText CD provides a supportive way to engage children with OWL literature.
Adaptations

Morning Meeting welcomes children to school and helps them get ready for the day’s activities. It is a time for them to settle into their classroom world and always begins with a song. The repetition found in most of the activities and songs will be helpful for many children with special needs. Group singing, recitation, and motor activities provide peer modeling, which is also beneficial.

Language Delays, Cognitive Delays, and Children on the Autism Spectrum

The following adaptations provide support for children with special needs during Morning Meeting activities.

- Children with language needs are sometimes unable to keep up with a song. Slowing the pace somewhat while singing will help children learn the words and keep up. Avoid using the OWL recording at first when singing with children. Instead, use the CD as a resource to learn the songs yourself. Then sing at a slower pace, especially while children are still learning the words. After children are familiar with a song, you may want to use the CD to let them hear the music and sing along with recorded voices.

- To keep children focused, engage them in a participatory activity such as this: “Now we’re going to sing our song about what you’re wearing.” Give a piece of colored paper to each child. “When we sing the song, hold up the paper that matches the color in the song.”

Motor, Sensory, Behavior, and Attention Difficulties

The following strategies not only support children with special needs, they may also help your day move along with fewer disruptions.

- Children with motor delays may need an adult to help them individually learn the gestures that go along with the songs. Observe children the first time or two that a song is offered. Some children may watch intensely, but not perform actions on their own at first. In time, these children may begin to imitate some of the actions. Other children may not watch because they are completely overwhelmed by the busyness and noise involved. In this case, provide direct help, such as taking the child’s hands and moving them together in a clapping motion. Be careful not to do too much at once. Many children do not like having someone move them through the motions, although they may appreciate a helping hand sometimes. Gradually, children will do more on their own.

- Subtle but specific verbal praise can be helpful during group circles. For example, an adult sitting next to an impulsive or disruptive child can lean over frequently to whisper, “I noticed you are sitting so nicely” when the child displays the appropriate behavior.

Group Activity Tip

An occupational therapist might want some children to wear a weighted vest during group activities to help them focus. Morning Meeting, as well as Center Time and Small Groups, are especially useful times to have occupational or physical therapists’ services.
Adaptations

Literacy Circle is rich in experiences that support language learning. During Literacy Circle, children focus on oral vocabulary, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge. Children with special needs benefit from explicit, supportive help in these areas.

Language Delays, Cognitive Delays, and Children on the Autism Spectrum

Provide adaptations that will help children with language tasks. For example:

- Some children’s attention tends to stray. You may want to insert very short, attention-getting activities, if you have a few children whose attention is very hard to maintain. For example, as a take off on the poem “What’s That Sound?” (Unit 1, Week 1) you can say beep–beep, honk–honk, or chirp–chirp. Children can march in place or stand up and sit down for each sound, saying the sound with you.

- When playing word games, vary your clues according to children’s skill levels. Often children with special needs know what a thing is but can’t retrieve the word from memory. To help, provide strong introductions to words and review their meanings: “The clock went beep, beep, beep to wake up the children.” Display an alarm clock or a picture of one. “This is an alarm clock. Who knows what an alarm clock does? What sound does it make?”

Picture Card Games

The Picture Cards in the OWL kit are excellent for many types of guessing games. You can come up with your own variations, depending on children’s abilities. You may want to play more picture card games in the time between units to give children more practice with key vocabulary. Following are suggestions for two games.

Game 1

Display three to five Picture Cards. Point to and name each card. Then have children close their eyes as you take one away. Ask: “Which one is missing?” After you have played the game a few times, remove two cards to make the game more challenging for children who might be ready.

Game 2

Instead of hiding pictures during a guessing game, show several pictures at once. Give clues that identify the picture you’re thinking of. Vary your clues from very simple to more difficult, to engage all children in the group. Ask children to raise their hands if they want to guess the picture and vary whom you call on, based on the level of the clues given. For children with language processing challenges, give one very clear clue, using as few words as possible.

Kinds of Clues for Word Games

*Category Clues*

“I’m thinking of a kind of musical instrument.”

*Story-Based Clues*

“Baby Louise’s grandfather played one of these.”

*Detail Clues*

“It’s long and thin, and you blow through little holes in it.”

*Phonological Clues*

“It beings with /h/, /h/, the same first sound as in happy.”
Adaptations

Center Time offers many opportunities for children to learn from each other through modeling and imitation. Children with developmental delays and other special needs require direct teaching and other support to take full advantage of what peers have to offer.

Cognitive Delays, Language Delays, and Children on the Autism Spectrum

Provide additional support for children as they work on projects, interact with others, and try to resolve conflicts.

- You can use OWL Envision It! Learning Strip 3 about Center Time or make visual aids that review the steps of demonstrations. (You can draw the pictures or use computer software.) Children can use the pictures as guides when there is no teacher in a center to prompt them. Mount the pictures on a folded strip of cardboard and stand it on the table where children are working.

- Help children use the language and actions of cooperation. For example, in the blocks area, say, “It’s my turn” and place a block. Then say, “Now it’s your turn.” Help the child choose and place blocks if necessary. Teachers may want to coach some children in the group about how to prompt the turn-taking: “Wait. It’s my turn now. Okay, now it’s your turn.”

- When conflicts arise, intervene and help children use appropriate social and emotional skills. Model helpful ways to talk together. For example: Billy wants the red truck that Maria is playing with. He grabs it from her, causing her to yell.

Teacher:  Billy, ask Maria, “Can I have the truck?”
Billy:  Can I have the truck?
Teacher:  Maria, tell Billy, “I’m playing with it now. You can have it when I’m done.”
Maria:  I’m playing with it now. You can have it when I’m done.
Teacher:  Billy, ask Maria, “When will you be done—in a little while or a long time?”
Billy:  You done in a little while or a long time?
Maria:  (without prompting): It will be a little while.
Teacher:  Should Billy stay here to wait? Or should he play with something else until you bring the truck to him?
Maria:  It will be a little long little while.
Teacher:  Okay, Maria. Billy, let’s see if we can find a puzzle for you while you wait. Maria (said so that Maria can overhear you) will bring the truck to you when she’s finished playing with it in a little while.

It is important that both Billy and Maria repeat their parts of the conversation. Over time, children learn reasonable expectations for behavior. For example, “Other children don’t have to drop what they are doing quickly, just because I want what they have, right now.” They learn to use the “scripts” that allow them to get information they need. When children begin to carry on these conversations independently, comment about their increasing skill: “Billy and Maria, I heard you talking about the truck. You made a plan about when Billy could have the truck. Then you both got a turn.” Reflect exactly what the children did or said that made the social situation work for them.
Motor Delays and Sensory Needs
Offer useful tools and provide help when children get frustrated trying to accomplish sensory tasks or tasks using fine motor skills. For example:

- Provide markers for children who tend to avoid drawing and writing. Unlike crayons, markers require no strength to leave a mark. They allow children with weak hands to have the fun of drawing and writing.
- Have letter stamps ready for children who cannot write their whole names, but wish to see it in recognizable letters. Of course, it is just fine for any preschool child to scribble a signature, and this should be encouraged as long as the child is satisfied with it.
- Some children will need Hand Over Hand (HOH) support to do puzzles. Guide children in looking at the shape by commenting about it as you point to features. Then help the child run a finger along the edge of the piece. Say, “Feel that pointed part? See this corner here in the board? Let’s see if the pointed part of the piece fits in there.”
- Children on the autism spectrum and some children with cognitive delays often repeat actions, such as pouring sand or water through their fingers, over and over. When a child repeats actions this way, join in the play to model variations. For example, show a different motion you can make with the sand or water saying, “Try this.”
- Children with cognitive or other delays may not stay long in certain centers. To lengthen their staying power, join them and engage in the activity yourself. Comment on what you are doing and offer materials and ideas. Many children who leave an activity or play area quickly simply don’t have ideas of their own that help them sustain their interest.
- For children who avoid drawing or who simply do a quick scribble on a piece of paper, try “duo drawing.” Sit side by side. Say, “Let’s draw a picture of you (or mom, dad, sister, brother).” Draw a circle and say, “This is the face.” (Circle your own face to help convey the meaning.) “Now, it’s your turn. A face needs some eyes (point to your own eyes). Can you make one eye?”

Dramatic Play Across Special Needs Areas
Many children with special needs have difficulty engaging in dramatic play. For children with autism, the social skills required (coordinating actions with others, consulting with others about what to play and how to play) are skills they lack. For other, more socially adept children, the cognitive challenges of play are overwhelming.

Children need to understand that play involves pretending—that a plastic container represents a teacup or that there’s pretend tea to drink in it, for example.

Children with language delays can also have difficulty because so much imaginary play is directed by speech. Other children designate roles (“I’m the grandma, and you’re the baby.”) and dictate play scripts. (“So, I’m going to work and then I’m coming home at five o’clock for dinner.”) Children who cannot respond are often neglected by their peers. The other children often assume that a quiet child who is unresponsive just doesn’t want to play with them.
Direct teaching is necessary for children with autism, cognitive and language delays, and for children with behavior issues during dramatic play. For example:

- A teacher or volunteer in the dramatic play area can play along, engaging children in play at a level that makes sense for them. This adult can serve as the go-between for a child with difficulties and other children. If the other children announce that they are going on a picnic and begin putting objects in a bag, the teacher can extend a hand to the child who needs help and say, “Oh, let’s go on a picnic too. Let’s get a bag and take a blanket to sit on.” In this way, with an adult serving as play partner and coach, children with limited language or cognitive skills can play with other children.

- Adult interpreting can also help children who have trouble hearing and processing language. When playmates talk so fast that a child can’t follow, an adult can restate the message: “Oh, he said, ‘Dinner is over; let’s wash the dishes.’” This will help children keep up with the play.

- Children with autism often fail even to repeat observed behaviors using real-life objects. Instead, these children may simply line up objects or tap them on the table ritualistically. Other children may just move toys around in ways they have seen others use them, but not truly “pretend.” They may seem not to have any idea how to pretend to feed a baby, shop, bake a cake, or perform other typical dramatic play actions. To help, a teacher can model pretending, performing real-life actions and the social behavior associated with them and then give children an opportunity to try.

- Once children have seen real-life modeling, try posting some pictures in the Pretend and Learn Center that they can rely on to find clues about what to do. Include pictures of children holding dolls, using toy pots and pans, and so on.
Adaptations

Small Groups is an excellent time to focus on specific goals and objectives in children’s Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Children with special needs often need explicit teaching. During Small Groups activities, teachers can provide the information, models, and practice that these children need.

Language Delays and Cognitive Delays

Many suggestions in this booklet for other parts of the curriculum also apply to Small Groups time. Here are a few additional ideas.

• Group children with special needs and typically developing children together. Make modifications within activities, rather than by grouping. This will give children with special needs good models to follow. It also will give typically developing children a chance to be helpers and to develop sensitivity to children who learn differently. Within a heterogeneous group, some children can work fairly independently; the teacher can focus more time on children who need the most help.

• Arrange workstations so that children share materials. Model how to ask another child to pass the markers, glue sticks, and so on. Encourage children with language delays to say what they are doing and what they want. Expand on what they say as you take a normal turn in the conversation. For example, if a child says to another child, “Scissors,” you might say, “Oh, you would like the scissors? Tell Monica, ‘Monica, I want the scissors please.’” The child might say only, “Scissors please,” but that’s a start. After the scissors are passed, you can prompt the child again by saying, “Say, ‘Thank you, Monica.’”

• Encourage children to use names when making a request: “Daniel, may I have the glue stick?” If a child does not use a name, ask, “Whom do you want to give you the glue stick?” The child will say, “Daniel” or point to him. “Okay. Please say his name first, or he won’t know you are talking to him. Say ‘Daniel, may I have the glue stick?’”

Family Connection Tip

Parents of children with developmental disabilities want to know details about their children’s progress. Send notes home on a regular basis about new concepts and skills that you are working on. Be specific. Rather than writing, “Shirelle is doing nicely,” you might write, “Today Shirelle practiced putting together the matching uppercase and lowercase letters for C, D, E and F.”
Adaptations

During Story Time, children must focus their attention for an extended time, listening carefully to oral language from story readings and discussions. For some children, prompt repetition of a story and of new vocabulary may be helpful. The following Story Time Plan shows how the structure of the weekly plan can be adapted for children with special needs.

### Story Time Plan

**Trade Book 1st Read (Day 1)**

- Have reasonable expectations. Simplify the text as needed; however, don’t “water down” the material.
- Don’t expect children to absorb or understand everything in just one reading.

**Trade Book 2nd Read (Day 2)**

- Think of this as an additional 1st Read. Read more of the actual text this time, with less simplification.

**Read More About It Selection 1st Read (Day 3)**

- Have reasonable expectations. Simplify the text as needed; however, don’t “water down” the material.
- Don’t expect children to absorb or understand everything in just one reading.

**Read More About It Selection 2nd Read (Day 4)**

- Think of this as an additional 1st Read. Read more of the actual text this time, with less simplification.

**Trade Book 3rd Read (Day 5)**

- Reconstruct story events or what the book is about.
- Ask questions such as “What happened next?” or “What is something that you learned?”

### Language Delays, Cognitive Delays,
and Children on the Autism Spectrum

To help children with language delays, chunk your language into short phrases. Include a pause or “wait time” so that they can process what has just been read or said. Teach children to say, “I’m thinking” in order to have time to process questions. Let them know you will come back to them for their responses.

Provide support that helps children proceed at their own pace. For example:

- Provide an extra visit to the book by doing a follow-up reading using props to help children focus and to give them something tactile to hold onto. Use an object that is similar to something in the story; for example, you could use a teddy bear for the story *Corduroy*.
- Do another picture walk with children. Point out important actions in the illustrations that are not mentioned in the text. For example, on the page where Lisa tells Corduroy she is going to take him home, we see the saleslady reaching toward the shelf to pick the bear up. You might comment, “Oh, the saleslady—the person right here (point)—heard Lisa, I guess. She’s taking Corduroy off the shelf so Lisa can take him home.”
- For books with more complex text, simplify the language as you read. Three ways to simplify text are to:
  - delete some sentences or parts of sentences if they are long
  - turn long sentences into two or three shorter sentences
  - tell some parts of a story rather than reading all of the text
- After children are familiar with a book, purchase a second copy. Take it apart, laminate the pages, and put it back together. Children can look at the book and listen to the *AudioText CD* during Library and Listening Center.
• Children on the autism spectrum are very concrete and need explanations and demonstrations to understand. For example, to explain escalators in Corduroy, move your hand up the stairs on the page. And when Ernst in The Puddle Pail “changes his mind,” explain, “First he had one idea about what to do and then he had a different idea instead.”

• Some children frequently make comments that are not relevant to the story at hand. When this happens, gently guide the child back to the story discussion. State an appropriate time when the child may speak with you. “Oh, you have a new puppy! You can tell me about the puppy at snack time. Right now we are talking about the stuffed animal in this story. What kind of animal was it?” For children whose language is just emerging, it is important to acknowledge rather than ignore off-topic comments.

Sensory or Attention Needs
Often, children lose attention because they’re having trouble keeping track of what’s happening in the story. Use strategies to help children expand their attention spans. For example:

• If a child’s attention strays, say the child’s name as you address a question to him or her. Then make a comment to all of the children: “Ricky, do you see the bear and the rabbit here on the cover?” Point. Then say to all the children, “The title of this book is Oscar Is Cold. Do you think one of these animals might be Oscar?”

• Read with good expression, but avoid using a consistently loud or excited voice, which varies too little to keep children’s attention.

• Cue children at critical points in the story so they can follow the plot.
Adaptations

When working with concepts from science, social studies, and math, children explore auditory and visual aspects to help develop vocabulary and content concepts. Developing concept vocabulary can be challenging for preschool children, and especially for children with special needs.

Language Delays, Cognitive Delays, and Children on the Autism Spectrum

Teachers can do several things to provide extra support. For example:

• Use a quick statement to alert children that you are going to begin. Say names of specific children when necessary. For example, you might say “Okay, everyone . . . Look at me. Look up here. Jamal . . . Sarah . . . Look here. I am going to tell you about being a scientist.” Be sure your tone of voice expresses your own interest. Begin immediately to demonstrate as you talk. If children still do not turn their attention to you, call them by name again as you continue: “Oh, Jamal, do you want to guess what is in the bag?”

• After explanations or directions, repeat the information in simple form. OWL also recommends using visual support for verbal directions or explanations. For children with special needs, teachers may need to adjust the balance of words and visual aids. For example, break instructions down into small steps, demonstrating each one.

• Adapt science activities to include more teacher demonstration and organize individual exploration in short steps. For example, for shadow activities (Unit 7), demonstrate how to cast a shadow by holding your hand in front of the flashlight beam. Then let children hold their own hands in front of the flashlight. Demonstrate again, holding plastic scissors in the flashlight beam. Then pass out scissors and let children try it on their own. Continue with a different object.

Articulation Difficulties

During Science & Social Studies Circle and Math Circle, children will offer ideas and comment on their thoughts. For children who have trouble expressing themselves, be patient, help them find words, and avoid frequent corrections.

• Rather than correcting a child who mispronounces a word, repeat the sentence using the correct pronunciation. For example, if a child says, “I gived Tory (for Corey) a turn to count the cubes,” a teacher might reply, “That was very kind. I’m sure Corey was happy that you gave him a turn.” Direct corrections can diminish a child’s willingness to talk.

• Many four-year-old children hesitate or repeat as they speak. This behavior is common because it is difficult for preschoolers to organize and convey their thoughts. The excitement, anger, frustration, or sadness that accompanied an event is felt again as a child recalls and relates an experience. Hesitation and starting-and-stopping behavior also naturally occur when a child’s language skills grow quickly. If a child gets stuck on initial sounds and grimaces at the same time, he or she may be experiencing a true stutter. This condition requires help from a specialist.

• Be patient. It is important that children know that you will wait for them until they get their statements out. In some cases, say some part of what you think the child is trying to express. In this way, one child’s turn does not take too long.

• Sometimes a child expresses thoughts, but in a disorganized way. In this case, restate the message in a more organized way to help other children understand.
Adaptations

Transitions, Meal Time, Outdoor Play
These times of the day offer many opportunities to help children with special needs practice motor skills plus explore language and social skills.

Motor Delays and Language Delays
The following suggestions provide support for children with special needs as well as help them extend their abilities.

• Some children are unable to navigate playtime structures, such as the climbing frame, successfully. They may spend most of outdoor playtime sitting in the sandbox or chasing around the playground. Assist these children by helping them practice each day. Enlist a peer who likes the climbing structure to play with the child who is reluctant. Give verbal cues to each placement of hands and feet.

• Obstacle courses can be set up inside or outside. Create one that requires children to go under, over, around, and through. Children will learn spatial concepts as they learn how to move their bodies.

• Lunch is a great time to encourage informal conversation. For children with language delays, you may need to suggest things they might say.

Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Attention Difficulties
Children with social, emotional, behavioral, and attention difficulties need very clear expectations. Some good phrases that help to avoid power struggles are the rule is; that’s not a choice; and first/then. Here are some examples of good teacher support.

• A child is coloring on the table or the wall with a marker. Rather than saying, “Don’t write on the table,” the teacher says, “The rule is that markers are used only on paper. Here’s your paper.”

• A child wants to go outside but it’s raining. She is upset. The teacher gives her two other choices of activities. She still wants to go outside. The teacher says, “That’s not a choice. It’s raining today, and we can’t go outside. You can choose blocks or the sand table.” (Choices should be immediately available.)

• Children who are impulsive often have trouble staying quiet on a mat. Some teachers create “nap boxes,” small containers with a few small toys for quiet play. Have enough containers so that children will have something different each day. Reserve their use for nap time.

• Children with expressive language difficulties and those who tend to be impulsive and quick to anger often have difficulty compromising or negotiating. It is important to role-play behavior they can use in these situations.

A Model for Role-Playing
Rules for Outdoor Play
Let’s talk about taking turns. Sometimes when you see someone riding a tricycle, you think, “I want to ride the tricycle.” You might yell, “Hey! Get off. I want a turn.” That’s not a good way to get a turn with the tricycle.

Instead, when you want a turn, you can say, “I want a turn when you are finished.” Let’s all say that: “I want a turn when you are finished.” I know that it’s hard for some of us to wait for a turn. So let’s practice one more time.
Adaptations

At the end of each day in OWL, Extend Your Day offers children more opportunities to hear stories and to participate in music activities, while Wrap Up Your Day and Wrap Up Your Week review skills and the weekly concept. Engaging children with books and music can be especially beneficial for children with special needs.

The adaptations suggested for the music activities in Morning Meeting in this booklet also apply to Extend Your Day. Here are more suggestions for Extend Your Day and Wrap Up Your Day/Week. You may also want to use Envision It! Learning Strip 5 as a visual cue for what happens at the end of an OWL day.

Language Delays, Cognitive Delays, and Children on the Autism Spectrum

Adaptations, such as the following, provide support for children with special needs.

- Children with delays usually like to be read to, but may have difficulty sustaining attention. To help them focus, reduce distractions as much as possible. Eliminate extraneous materials from the reading circle and keep noise to a minimum.
- To make what you’re reading more interesting, avoid reading verbatim. Add your own inflections, talk about the pictures, ask questions, and encourage interaction. Invite children to chime in as you read. Add anything simple that corresponds to the book, appeals to the senses, and will further engage children.
- Sing familiar, favorite songs often. Omit key words and ask children to fill them in. Singing the song slowly will make it easier for children with special needs to respond and will also provide an interesting beat to a familiar song for other children.

Motor Delays and Sensory Needs

Movement with music is especially beneficial for children with special needs.

- For music activities, provide simple props, such as scarves, which will help children focus on the activity. Besides having children wave the scarves over their heads to enhance the music experience, the scarves can also be used to identify parts of the body. (“Put the scarf on your head.”)
- Musical instruments may need to be adapted for children with motor disabilities. For example, if a child has trouble maintaining a strong hand grip, you can add a circle of soft elastic to an instrument’s handle; the child will be less likely to lose the instrument.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Difficulties

Provide explicit feedback about appropriate behavior. For example:

- Dancing and moving to music can be much fun for a child with special needs. However, be clear about what is not acceptable behavior, for example, falling onto other children or pushing. You may need to hold the child’s hand during music activities.
- It is important to provide positive reinforcement. Praise children often. Keep track of good behavior and reward it. “Good for you, Luis. You followed the rule and stayed on your carpet square during reading. You get a sticker.”

Family Connection Tip

Have a communication book that goes back and forth from home to school. Ask parents or caregivers to write something that the child did at home. Talk with the child about it. Or prompt the child to share the experience during informal group conversations.
A Comprehensive Early Literacy Program

Adaptations for Children with Special Needs