

Teaching the Special Needs Child Sandra Cox, D.M.A., F.N.P

sandraecoxflute@gmail.com

sandraflute@me.com

Things we have to think about, as teachers, when dealing with students are especially important with the student with special needs.

- Establishing a relationship (one where child feels okay to be him/her self)
- How to handle conflict (refusal to practise, arguing, sassy mouth)
- Negotiation of responsibilities (how much to assign per lesson)
- Dealing with frustration (learning disabilities)
- How to deal with child's ability to process
- Dealing with ultra-short attention spans
- Keeping them interested.
- Consistency

One of the goals of dealing with the child with special needs is to find their strengths and build on those.

ADHD -- WHEN SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOR COMPROMISES THEIR ABILITY TO PAY ATTENTION OR CONTROL THEIR BEHAVIOR.

There are two big categories of ADHD: **HYPERACTIVITY** and **INATTENTION**. People can have one type predominantly or a combination.

What can you do when you are dealing with a student with ADHD?

- Maintain a Routine
- Establish Lesson/Class rules
- Plan Ahead
- Keep it short
- Avoid repetition
- Be tolerant
- Reward good behavior
- Stay in contact with the parent

DEPRESSION - An abnormal extension, or over-elaboration, of sadness and grief. The word depression can denote a variety of phenomena (e.g. a sign, symptom, syndrome, emotional state, reaction, disease, or clinical disorder).

Some of the signals kids send that indicate depression include:

- random, frequent physical complaints
- missing school and/or lessons
- lethargy or boredom
- decreased interaction/communication
- loss of interest in the usual things
- oversensitivity
- labile emotions
- emotional outbursts
- irritability, hostility where there was none
- **RECKLESS BEHAVIOR, RISK-TAKING**
- alcohol or drug use

ANXIETY - Anxiety has both mental and physical symptoms. Many of the physical symptoms are caused by the 'fight or flight' response. It is an involuntary response to a perceived threat. This is an individual response and universal. If we do not stop these feelings, they will magnify and progressively worsen. This is what you experience when you have performance anxiety or stage fright. Important things to remember about Anxiety:

- Consider the *readiness* of the student. Giving one a piece that is above their level will often stimulate anxiety.
- The *resilience* of the student will dictate how they handle what you assign them
- Giving the student who is not ready, emotionally or physically, more than they can handle, sets them up for development of anxiety.

OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER (ODD) - Students with ODD are the ones that are constantly pushing your limits. This is hard to define, since many of the things you see are found in the normal teenager. When the symptoms are persistent (lasting longer than 6 months), and consistent, you need to be concerned. One of the most important ways to deal with ODD is to **SET CLEAR LIMITS**. Let them help choose the consequences of their actions, and praise them if they do something correctly.

These students are exceptionally difficult to deal with, especially since they will often get worse over time, instead of better. **IT WILL HELP THE PARENTS TO KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE LESSONS, SINCE IT HELPS ESTABLISH A PATTERN.**

Other ways to deal with this behavior is to

- AVOID POWER STRUGGLES.
- MAKE SURE CONSEQUENCES CAN BE ENFORCED
- STAY CALM WHEN THE OPPOSITIONAL BEHAVIOR STARTS
- OFFER ACCEPTABLE CHOICES AS CONSEQUENCES
- BE CONSISTENT AND UNEMOTIONAL
- BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL
- PICK YOUR BATTLES

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME (AUTISM SPECTRUM) - This covers many different degrees of impairment, from the very high functioning to low functioning. Some of the things you will notice in Asperger's Syndrome:

- Impaired ability to socialize
- Issues with language
- Problems with behaviors

DO NOT FOCUS ON WHAT THE CHILD CAN'T DO...INSTEAD, FIND WAYS TO WORK WITH THEIR STRENGTHS!! So, how do you deal with Asperger's students in your studio?

- Keep directions short and simple (KISS)
- Add flexibility to schedule, especially with younger students (this helps them adapt to change better when older)
- Limit time spent on their special interests, or use it as a reward for good behavior
- Limit choices (a lot of choices overwhelms them) to 2-3
- Explain eye contact and why it is necessary (this is an alien concept to them)
- Give lots of positive reinforcement and praise
- Figure out what type learner the student is and adjust your teaching as much as possible

