MAKING ADJUSTMENTS
Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners Through Classroom Adaptations

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
www.mdek12.org/EC

Many of the ideas in this booklet were adapted from:
- Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs
- Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice
- Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Early Childhood Settings, and
- High Leverage Practices in Special Education.

Adaptations provided in this document are strictly examples, and are not only for children with disabilities but any child who may be struggling with a skill. Use these adaptations as a basis for your own ideas to meet the specific needs of your children.
Inclusion of ALL Children

Inclusion allows young children with and without disabilities to participate in the same community of learners. An inclusive prekindergarten program recognizes and addresses the diverse needs and interests of each child. Inclusion of young children allows for a child "at-risk," depending on the circumstances or the skill involved, high-quality programs provide differentiated instruction for children's varying needs. Any child has the potential to be a child "at-risk," depending on the needs and interests of each child.

What Does a High-Quality Early Childhood Program Look Like?

A high-quality early childhood program meets the requirements of the MDE Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Old Children, including principles of developmentally-appropriate practice based on child development and the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child. It has:

- Engaging interactions
- A responsive and predictive environment
- Teaching matched to the individual child
- Many opportunities for learning
- Appropriate levels of guidance
- Safe and hygienic practices
- Developmentally-appropriate materials and activities

Adaptations should be used to overcome barriers and help children learn. They should only be used as necessary and faded as appropriate as the child gains mastery.
Teacher Tips
Process for Adapting Curriculum and Instruction

Use a thoughtful process for planning and using adaptations as needed.

- How the child participates/engages in the activity and affects learning.
- Start with the most natural, least intrusive adaptations.
- Appropriate adaptations that will enable the child to participate.
- Child(ren) that might need adaptations to succeed.
- Instructional plans for this activity. How will this activity be implemented from beginning to end?
- Goals for this activity. What do you want the children to learn?
- Routine to be implemented.
- Your group of children. Consider:

For activities, consider:

- Child’s needs.
- Goals for learning.
- Appropriate adaptations.
When working with ALL children, it is important to identify their preferences. By doing so, more participation will result. Consider the interests of each child in your class. As you are making adaptations, consider the interests of each child. When working with ALL children, it is important to identify their preferences. By doing so, more participation will result.

**Tip:** Using Child Preferences

I had a girl in my class who consistently played with scissors and cutting pictures out. I moved the cars to the art area, so I used the wheels in paint. I let her roll the car around the area, so I moved the cars in the block with the car in the block. Cameron loves magazines and would flip through them during free play. So, I use the magazines as a teaching tool by finding objects, cutting pictures out, and integrating his or her interests into the classroom. As you are making adaptations, consider the interests of each child.
To support children that have language difficulties, those who need visual reminders, or those who are dual language learners, provide visual supports throughout the classroom. This may include picture schedules, picture cues for specific activities, and labels for classroom areas and materials. To meet a variety of children’s needs, labels should include a picture, word(s) in English, and word(s) in other languages spoken by children in your class. Using visual supports in the classroom will promote early reading skills, as children associate pictures/items with the written word.
For instructions on how to paint:

Picture cues are great for use during daily routines and activities.

TIP

For hand washing:

To teach a procedure:
The children in the class can be a big help to one another. A child can model how to do an activity or can be paired up to be a helper. Peers can also use praise and encouragement during difficult routines. By utilizing peers to help a child that is having a hard time, the peer is also learning about differences and acceptance. The children in the class can be a big help to one another.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines can help teachers design flexible lessons to meet the needs of all learners. The principles of UDL provide for multiple means of:

- Engagement,
- Representation, and
- Action & Expression.

To learn more about UDL, go to http://ectacenter.org/topics/atech/udl.asp.
Some children with disabilities will need specialized equipment or an adaptive device in order to fully participate in the program. Commercial adapted equipment includes wheelchairs, walkers, adapted bicycles, switch toys, board maker programs, and augmentative communication devices.

To find out more information on accessing adapted equipment, ask the child's special education teacher/therapist or contact:

- Institute for Disability Studies: 1.888.671.0051
- Project Start: 1.800.852.8328
- T. K. Martin Center: 1.662.325.1028

Some children with disabilities will need specialized equipment or an adaptive device in order to fully participate in the program.
If a child has difficulty turning the pages of a book, simply add popsicle sticks to each page or place raised adhesive dots or self-stick rubber pads in the upper right-hand corner. These simple adaptations make the pages easier to lift and reading time becomes more independent.
Teach skills within typical activities. Intentionally embed opportunities of practice and ongoing assessment throughout the day rather than having a child sit at a table completing worksheets.

Take advantage of the child’s interests during free play and routines. For example, if a child has trouble with counting:

- Count the steps it takes to reach the water fountain from your classroom.
- Count popsicle sticks he glued onto his project during art.
- Provide books with pictures to count.
- Help the child count the fruit he is putting in the pot in dramatic play.
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- Help the child count the fruit he is putting in the pot in dramatic play.
- Provide manipulatives such as counting bears during free play.
- Provide books with pictures to count.
- Count the steps it takes to reach the water fountain from your classroom.

Provide opportunities of practice and ongoing assessment throughout the day rather than having a child sit at a table completing worksheets.

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Process for Adapting Classroom Areas

Please keep in mind:

- These adaptations are not strictly limited to one area, with many being appropriate to use throughout the classroom.
- Adaptations should only be used as needed and faded when no longer necessary.
Use a picture schedule with the daily routine.
- During arrival, place a picture card in the child’s cubby of the first task of the day (e.g., picture of block area).
- Provide visual reminders in centers if how students should clean up before moving to another activity.
- Give clear and simple instructions.
- Provide visual reminders in centers of how students contact paper to assist with difficulties lining up.
- Tape construction-paper feet to the ground and cover with contact paper or “skips to your next center.”
- Provide silly transition cues such as “walk sideways to the bathroom” or “first task of the day (e.g., picture of block area) during arrival. Place a picture card in the child’s cubby of the first task of the day.”
- During arrival, place a picture card in the child’s cubby of the first task of the day.
Provide individual carpet squares to encourage children to keep their hands to themselves during circle time.

Use tangible objects/puppets during circle time to make songs and books more meaningful and interesting.

Use a flannel board with felt pieces that represent the story to help with engagement and comprehension.

If a child is not able to answer open-ended questions independently, ask a peer for some suggestions or answers and let the child choose.

Ask the assistant teacher to sit behind the child and provide hand-over-hand assistance for movement to songs.

Adaptations during Group Time
Provide writing utensils that vary in size, shape, and color.

- Adaptations in the Writing Center
For children with sensory sensitivities, provide a large zip-top bag filled with sand, water, or other items to give them a chance to participate without having to touch the actual items. Change the item in the sensory table periodically to provide different sensory input. Dried beans or rice are good items to try.

For children who perseverate at the sand/water table, provide a timer that limits the amount of time that is spent there.
Provide a variety of sensory experiences, including things to touch, listen to, and smell.

To build connections between an item and its visual and printed representations, pair items with pictures and words.

Put actual items in the center when possible, as some children need this to develop an understanding of concepts.

Adaptations in the Science/Discovery Center

Adaptations in the
Add Velcro to puzzle pieces and make a Velcro band for the child's hand.

Glue small blocks to puzzle pieces as handles.

Draw a line down a sheet of plain white paper so when the child counts, he can simply move the object across to help with one-to-one correspondence.

Provide pipe cleaners for stringing beads.

Use copy paper box lids for a child's individual work space.

Adaptations in the manipulative center
Add Velcro to blocks (for children who have difficulty stacking).

Provide a non-skid mat for tables.

To make cardboard blocks, stuff empty food boxes with newspaper, wrap them in wrapping paper, then cover with contact paper to avoid tearing.

Adaptations in the Block Center:

- Use a tray for children to build blocks so the blocks stay contained.
- Provide lightweight cardboard blocks.
- Include blocks in various sizes and weights (for children who have difficulty lifting heavier blocks).
- Provide a non-skid mat for tables.
- Add Velcro to blocks (for children who have difficulty stacking).
Put foam curlers on paintbrushes for easier grasp.

Use tabletop easels to change angle of view for child.

Stabilize paper with clothespins or tape.

Provide adapted scissors.

Provide a marker stand to help keep up with marker tops.

Provide easy-to-grasp markers, crayons, and brushes.

Stabilize materials with cookie tray/non-skid mat.

Provide a marker stand to help keep up with marker tops.

(can add rubber bands if no allergies).

Use tabletop easels to change angle of view for child.

Put foam curlers on paintbrushes for easier grasp.
Provide materials of various textures.

- Use Velcro instead of buttons for children who have difficulty fastening clothes.
- Use puppets to facilitate language development.
- Using Picture Cues™.
- Provide visual or auditory cues as needed (see “Tip: Provide materials of various textures.”)

Dramatic Play Center: Adaptations in the
Add books with raised pictures and/or high-contrast colors.

Use headphones and recorded stories.

Adapt some books (see “Tip: How to Adapt Books”).

Provide a variety of reading levels.

Adapt new books to the center to maintain interest.

Parents send from home to spark child’s interest.

Make books with photographs from field trips or pictures.

Use headphones and recorded stories.

Adapt books with raised pictures and/or high-contrast colors.

Adaptations in the Library Center.
Build up the pedals on a tricycle with unit blocks (securely taped) for a child whose feet cannot reach the pedals.

Transport a non-mobile child to the playground in a wagon or riding toy.

Provide alternative items for children who do not participate with gross motor equipment, such as easels and paint, musical instruments, or sidewalk chalk.

Adaptations during outdoor play.
Adaptations by Specific Need

Process for Adapting by Specific Need

Please keep in mind:

- These adaptations are not strictly limited to children with disabilities and may benefit other children as well.
- Children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may have specific accommodations and/or modifications listed on their IEPs that must be provided. While those items are required, the child may benefit from other adaptations as well.

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Please keep in mind:

Adaptations by Specific Need
Teach children to use a “break” card that can be given to the teacher when the child is feeling overwhelmed or needs to step away briefly.

Have a “safe place” or “soft zone” in your room for children to use as needed.

Teach children how and when to use it.

Have a short time of quiet when they need it and teach the teacher when the child is feeling overwhelmed or needs to step away briefly.

Teach children to use a “break” card that can be given to the teacher.

Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide children's behavior.

Provide direct instruction on appropriate interpersonal skills. Role-play with children in a small group, including children with various skill levels.
Listen attentively when a child speaks and respond to what the child says. It may be difficult at first but as you get to know the child it becomes easier.

Use gestures along with spoken words when giving directions.

Ask the child open-ended questions instead of yes or no questions.

Avoid speaking for the child. Listen without interrupting him or her.

Repeat what the child says so he or she knows that you understand him or her. For instance, if a child says, "want paint," say, "You want paint," and then give them the paint.

Use names for objects, places and actions. Instead of saying, "Put it over there," say "Hang your bag on the hook."

Rather than asking, "Are you painting?" ask, "What are you doing?"

Avoid speaking for the child. Listen without interrupting him or her.

Listen attentively when a child speaks and respond to what the child says. It may be difficult at first but as you get to know the child it becomes easier.

**Language Impairments**

**Adaptations for Children with Language Impairments**
Arrange indoor and outdoor play areas so all children using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches can easily pass through.

Be sure tables are the correct height. If a wheelchair needs to fit beneath, tables may need to be taller.

Make sure chairs are the correct height. Feet should be supported on the floor or step stool.

Provide materials that are easier to grasp and hold (ex. large puzzle pieces).

Position materials where they can be reached from any position.

Ask parents or therapists about specialized adaptive seating or positioning devices such as standing tables or wedges.

Ask about adaptive equipment such as switch toys or computers.

Physically disabled children with physical disabilities. Let the child know you are going to touch, handle or move him or her. Be aware that unexpected touching may startle some children with physical disabilities.

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Be sure tables are the correct height. If a wheelchair needs to fit beneath the table, tables may need to be taller.

Provide materials that are easier to grasp and hold (ex. large puzzle pieces).

Place materials where they can be reached from any position.

Ask parents or therapists about specialized adaptive seating or positioning devices such as standing tables or wedges.

Ask about adaptive equipment such as switch toys or computers.
Establish a consistent routine.

Verbally review the daily schedule. Provide picture cues as reminders.

Warn of transitions in advance. Provide visual cues such as a ball for outdoor play or a book for circle time.

Use simple, clear language. Directions should be simple, concrete, and carefully defined.

Listen to the child’s behavior.

Accept non-speech communication. Watch for eye-gazing (looking toward or away from an item), body language or facial expressions.

Use simple, clear language. Directions should be simple, concrete, and carefully defined.

Provide visual cues in addition to auditory cues. For example, create picture choice cards. Use augmentative communication (sign language, communication boards) as recommended by parents. Provide visual cues in addition to auditory cues. For example:

Rehearse difficult situations verbally. Explain what the class will be doing and what his or her role may be.

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Maintain consistent room arrangement. Some children can transition more easily if they have an object to hold (e.g., let a child carry the sandbox shovel to outside time or a finger cymbal to music). This will help reduce fear of the unknown.

Add tactile cues to anything you would otherwise label with a picture. Describe the parts of an object and how it works. Use the actual background to colored cars or trucks. Provide high contrast materials (e.g., a piece of light paper as a picture).

Describe or provide hand-over-hand assistance with tasks. Add tactile cues to anything you would otherwise label with a picture. Describe the parts of an object and how it works. Use the actual background to colored cars or trucks. Provide high contrast materials (e.g., a piece of light paper as a picture).

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Add tactile cues to anything you would otherwise label with a picture. Describe the parts of an object and how it works. Use the actual background to colored cars or trucks. Provide high contrast materials (e.g., a piece of light paper as a picture).
Use total communication (gestures, pictures, demonstration).

- Avoid standing with your back to the light source. This makes your face and hands very hard to see.
- Signal transitions visually (e.g., flicker the lights in the room).
- Use picture cues and as many other visual aids as possible.
- Use many gestures and modelling.
- Teach sign language to peers and other personnel (again, if the child is being instructed in this manner in other settings).
- Teach sign language (if the child is being instructed in this manner).
- In other settings.
- Use language and language.

Adaptations for Children with Deaf or Hearing Impairment (continued)
Be sure to have the child’s attention before talking to him or her.

Use simple, clear language. Directions should be simple, concrete, and carefully defined.

Avoid long periods of sitting. Children should be actively engaged in learning centers.

Establish a consistent routine.

Provide clear expectations.

Embed learning time into transitions. Limit the amount of waiting time.

Verbally review the daily schedule. Provide picture cues.

Limit the type and number of new situations encountered at one time.

Plan many short activities or multiple components to a long activity, with clear starting and stopping points.

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Embed difficult skills within tasks that children succeed at more difficult tasks that are difficult for them. Embed these tasks in long leisure time and finish learning tasks with success. Sometimes children spend less time on tasks that are difficult for them.

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Use explicit instruction. Show and tell children what to do or think while solving problems.

Keep verbal directions simple. Use gestures to help the child understand what is expected.

Allow the child an extra try (or more) to succeed at a skill, as he/she may need additional repetitions of instruction and practice.

Increase your wait time when asking questions to give the child time to process.

Give the child advanced warning about activity changes and be consistent during transitions.

Provide visual supports as needed.

Consistently reward the child with praise for his or her efforts.

Alternate activities between quiet and active, free play and teacher-directed to help with attention span.

Break tasks into small parts and allow the child to learn one part at a time.

Adaptations for Children with Cognitive Impairments

(continued)
Use both monolingual and bilingual books for the languages of the classroom (including fiction and non-fiction audio books).

Label items in the room in all languages used by children in the class.

Try learning 10-20 key words/phrases in the child’s home language to help them feel welcome, safe, and comfortable.

In math, build connections for what children already know, for example, of counting, comparing quantities, ordering objects, measuring, and sorting.

Create and identify patterns, sequencing, and comparing.

In a picture communication board or cards on an O-ring for needs or feelings.

Make use of a picture communication board or cards on an O-ring for needs or feelings.

Use music in different languages.

Classroom adaptations for children who are dual language learners.