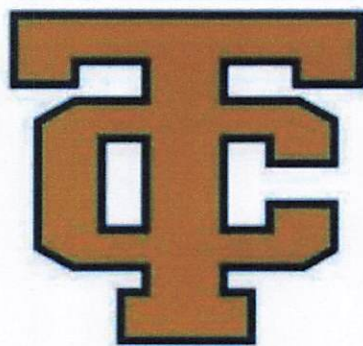


Instructional Assistant Handbook

TMS

2026-2027



Notes

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Welcome!

Welcome to TMS. We are excited to have you join our team of dedicated, and amazing professionals in supporting students with special needs.

This handbook serves as a guide to help you understand your role, responsibilities, and expectations within the special education setting. This handbook will also provide you with valuable information about TMS classrooms and how you can help support our students' individual needs.

Roles and Responsibilities

At TC, we believe in the power of teamwork. As an educational aide, you are a critical member of our staff, playing an essential role in supporting students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional development.

Your responsibilities may include, but are not limited to:

- **Supporting the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):**

Assist students in meeting their IEP goals by providing accommodations and supports as directed by the teacher or intervention specialist. This support may occur in a one-on-one setting, small group, or within the general education classroom.

- **Following Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs):**

Implement behavior strategies as outlined in a student's BIP, under the guidance of the intervention specialist or classroom teacher.

- **Collaborating with staff:**

Maintain open and effective communication with teachers and staff to share observations, monitor progress, and work together on strategies to support student success.

- **Providing social and emotional support:**

Build positive, respectful relationships with students that promote trust, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

- **Collecting data:**

Track and record student progress toward IEP goals as directed by the supervising teacher or specialist.

- **Maintaining confidentiality:**

Respect and protect student privacy. Do not share information about a student's academic performance, medical needs, family circumstances, or personal details with others unless authorized.

General Expectations

Professional Expectations for Educational Aides

Punctuality

Arrive on time and be fully prepared to support students at the beginning of the school day and during scheduled activities. Your punctuality is essential to maintaining a consistent and supportive learning environment.

Attendance

Enter all absences into Frontline as soon as you become aware you will be out. Additionally, notify the principal, the principal's secretary and the assigned teacher promptly regarding any absence or tardiness. Refer to the "Notifying Absences" section for detailed procedures.

Adherence to Schedule

Follow the schedule provided by your supervising teacher to ensure instructional time is used effectively. If any conflicts, discrepancies, or concerns arise, promptly communicate with the teacher for clarification or adjustments.

Communication

Engage in open, respectful, and professional communication with all team members. Frequent, clear communication helps ensure student success. Ask questions, share relevant updates, and express concerns in a timely manner. Educational aides will have at least one dedicated planning day with their team and are expected to be present and actively involved.

Professionalism

Conduct yourself in a manner that reflects professionalism at all times. Treat students, families, and colleagues with respect, empathy, and patience. Adhere to school and district policies, and model ethical behavior and high standards.

Confidentiality

Protect the privacy and confidentiality of student information at all times. This includes academic records, behavioral data, medical information, family matters, and any other personal circumstances.

Flexibility

Working in special education often requires adaptability. Schedules may change due to classroom shifts, student needs, specialist availability, or new enrollments. Remain flexible and responsive to changes. Demonstrate a willingness to learn and ask for support when needed.

Documentation

Complete all required documentation accurately and in a timely manner. This may include progress monitoring, behavior or incident reports, and other school-related records.

Cell Phone Use

Personal cell phone use during the school day should be limited. Do not engage in social media or personal communication while supervising or working directly with students. Exceptions include school-related use, such as PBIS point entry or emergency medical situations.

Social Media

Employees must not use social media in any way that misrepresents the school or district. Avoid posting any content that references students, staff members, or families. Maintain professional boundaries and confidentiality in all digital communications.

Ethical Responsibilities

Instructional Authority

Recognize that the supervising teacher holds primary responsibility for a student's instruction and behavior plan. While aides play a valuable role in implementing these plans, all instructional decisions and behavior management strategies are directed by the supervising teacher.

Parent Communication

Educational aides should not initiate communication with parents or guardians regarding a student's academic progress or behavioral concerns unless specifically directed to do so by the supervising teacher.

Personal Contact Information

Do not share your personal phone number with students or parents. All communication must occur through official school channels, such as district email or the school phone system.

Social Media & Boundaries

To maintain professional boundaries, do not add students or parents as friends or followers on social media platforms. Personal and professional interactions should remain separate to protect the integrity of your role and the privacy of the school community.

Referring Parent Concerns

If a parent or caregiver approaches you with a question or concern, refer them directly to the supervising teacher. A helpful response might be:

"Thank you for sharing that with me. I'll be sure to pass this on to [supervising teacher], and they will follow up with you."

Maintaining Confidentiality

As an educational aide, you may be privy to sensitive information about students and their families. It is your legal and ethical responsibility to protect this information.

Key Guidelines for Confidentiality:

- Do not discuss students in public areas, including the staff lounge, hallways, or community locations such as grocery stores.
- Never share information about one student with the parent or guardian of another student.
- Avoid discussing student issues with anyone who does not have a direct role in their education.
- If you are unsure whether something is appropriate to share, consult your supervising teacher or building administrator for guidance.

Maintaining confidentiality builds trust with students, families, and colleagues, and ensures that all students are treated with dignity and respect.

Notifying Absences

Educational Aides

If you know ahead of time that you will be absent from your role as an educational aide, please do the following as soon as possible:

- Enter your absence in the **Frontline** system.
- Notify both the **Principal** and the **Office Secretary**.
- Prepare a **daily schedule** and **plans** for the substitute to follow, if applicable.

Timely communication allows us to ensure consistent support for students in your absence. Having clear plans and a schedule ready will help the substitute maintain your normal routine.

We encourage you to log into Frontline and practice entering an absence before you are unexpectedly out sick. If you need help using the system or have questions, please reach out **before August 31**.

Schedules

As an educational aide in the education setting, you will collaborate closely with the intervention specialist, general education teachers, and special area staff to support the diverse academic and behavioral needs of students.

Your daily schedule—provided by the main office—will outline your responsibilities, including time spent supporting students in classrooms, working one-on-one, or in small group settings. It will also indicate your designated duties and lunch.

Please note: schedules as an educational aide are fluid and may shift due to changing student needs or unforeseen circumstances. Flexibility is essential. The teacher will notify you of any changes and provide an updated schedule when adjustments are made.

Following the schedule and remaining flexible helps ensure the classroom runs smoothly and that students receive the support they need. Ongoing collaboration with the teaching team is vital—they will provide direction regarding specific accommodations, modifications, and support strategies tailored to each student.

The schedule is a tool to help guide the day and promote student success. By staying adaptable and responsive, you show your dedication to meeting students' needs and contributing to a positive learning environment.

Individualized Education Programs

If you are a special education aide, you will need be be familiar with many aspects of special education. Special education is designed to support the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. It includes a range of services, strategies, and accommodations that help students access the general curriculum and achieve success.

A key element of special education is the **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**—a legally required document developed by a team that includes parents/guardians, teachers, and specialists. The IEP outlines a student's specific goals, services, accommodations, and any supports necessary to meet their educational needs.

Each IEP is personalized to reflect a student's strengths, challenges, and areas of focus. It acts as a guide for the educational team to help ensure the student receives the support needed to grow and succeed.

As an educational aide, you play an important role in helping implement each student's IEP. You will be provided with an **"IEP at a Glance"** for each student you work with. This summary includes key goals, accommodations, and service details. The general education teacher will also have a copy for any student in their classroom with an IEP.

This information is **confidential** and must be handled with care and professionalism.

At the start of the school year, take time to review each student's **"IEP at a Glance."** For support in implementing any part of an IEP, always consult with the classroom teacher and special education teacher. They will guide you in using effective strategies that align with each student's individualized plan.

Disabilities Overview

To effectively support students with special needs, it's important to have a basic understanding of the various disabilities and conditions you may encounter. Below are some common categories of disabilities, along with ways you can help support students in each area:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD is a developmental disorder that can affect communication, social interaction, and behavior.

Students with ASD may:

- Have difficulty understanding social cues or expressing themselves
- Experience sensory sensitivities
- Benefit from predictable routines and visual supports

Support strategies include using clear instructions, visual schedules, and helping students build social skills in structured ways.

Other Health Impairment (OHI)

One common condition under OHI is:

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition involving difficulties with attention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity.

Students with ADHD may:

- Struggle to stay focused or organized
- Have trouble following directions
- Act impulsively or become easily distracted

Helpful supports include clear expectations, structured routines, visual reminders, and allowing for movement breaks.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

SLDs involve challenges in acquiring academic skills such as reading, writing, or math.

Examples include:

- Dyslexia** (reading difficulties)
- Dyscalculia** (math-related difficulties)

Students with SLDs may benefit from:

- Multi-sensory teaching methods
- Explicit, step-by-step instruction
- Assistive technology to support learning

Intellectual Disabilities (ID)

Intellectual disabilities involve limitations in both intellectual functioning and everyday adaptive skills.

Students with ID may:

- Need extra support in communication, daily living, and problem-solving
- Benefit from repeated practice and clear, consistent routines

Key strategies include individualized instruction, visual supports, and promoting independence whenever possible.

Disabilities Continued

Speech and Language Disorders

These disorders affect a student's ability to communicate effectively and may involve:

- Difficulty pronouncing sounds or words
- Challenges understanding or using language
- Trouble following multi-step directions

Support strategies include encouraging expressive language practice, using visual aids, and following any recommendations from the speech-language pathologist.

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD)

These conditions impact a student's emotional regulation, behavior, and social interactions. Students may:

- Struggle with managing emotions or maintaining self-control
- Have difficulty forming peer relationships
- Display disruptive or withdrawn behaviors

Helpful supports include implementing individualized behavior plans, teaching coping strategies, and maintaining a calm, structured, and positive classroom environment.

Hearing Impairments

Hearing impairments range from partial to complete hearing loss and can affect the way a student receives spoken information.

Students may benefit from:

- Preferential seating to help with lip reading or use of amplification devices
- Visual supports such as written instructions or picture cues
- Sign language, closed captioning, or speech-to-text tools

Your role may include reinforcing visual communication and helping the student access information clearly.

Visual Impairments

These include partial sight, low vision, or blindness, and can impact how students access printed or visual materials.

Support strategies include:

- Providing materials in Braille or large print
- Using tactile or auditory learning tools
- Ensuring the student's environment is physically accessible and well-organized

Collaborating with specialists, such as vision teachers or mobility instructors, helps ensure each student can navigate their learning environment successfully.

Strategies by Disability

DISABILITY	STRATEGIES
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement visual schedules and cues to provide predictability and structure. • Use social stories to help the student understand and navigate social situations. • Create a quiet designated space for the student to take sensory breaks. • Use visual supports such as timers, token systems, "First, Then" boards, to aid in time management and task completion • Give reminders/warnings before an upcoming transition. • Practice and reinforce social skills through role-playing and modeling.
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break tasks into smaller, manageable steps. • Provide clear and concise instructions. • Use visual aids such as checklists, graphic organizers, visual reminders, to help with organization. • Encourage movement breaks/schedule movement breaks throughout the day to help channel excess energy. • Utilize timers to assist with time management and staying on task.
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide multi-sensory materials and instruction to accommodate different learning styles. • Offer opportunities for repetition and review of concepts. • Use assistive technology such as speech to text or text to speech software (i.e. Google Read & Write Chrome extension), and graphic organizers, to support with reading and writing tasks. • Provide extra time or allow student to do less problems on a page (i.e. only do the odds or evens). • Provide modified assignments to accommodate for reading difficulties. • Break down larger tasks into smaller more manageable steps/parts.

Strategies by Disability

DISABILITY	STRATEGIES
Intellectual Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor instruction to the student's specific needs, focusing on their strengths and abilities. Break down complex concepts into smaller, manageable parts. • Use concrete examples and visual aids to support understanding. • Provide hands-on and experiential learning opportunities. • Simplify instructions and use clear, concise language. • Offer additional time for tasks and assignments. • Incorporate individualized goals and objectives into daily activities and lessons. • Employ a system of positive reinforcement to motivate and encourage students. Praise their efforts and achievements, provide tangible rewards or incentives. • Explore the use of assistive technology tools and applications that can enhance learning and promote independence for students with intellectual disabilities.
Emotional/ Behavioral Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the team to identify the function or purpose behind the student's challenging behavior. • Provide clear expectations, consistent routines, and visual cues to help students feel secure and supported. Students like predictability. • Implement behavior management systems, such as a token economy or behavior chart (allow students to work for points or tokens to redeem them for preferred items or activities), "First, Then" board, timers, transition warnings etc. • Provide frequent check-ins and positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. • Learn and utilize de-escalation techniques (See De-escalation Techniques" page for more info) to help students manage and regulate their emotions during challenging situations. Teach and practice coping strategies. • Avoid engaging in power struggles with students. Focus on de-escalation, redirection, and providing choices when appropriate. Maintain a calm and patient demeanor.

Strategies by Disability

DISABILITY	STRATEGIES
Visual Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure a well lit and uncluttered learning environment.• Provide high contrast materials and labels.• Arrange furniture and materials in a consistent layout.• Provide access to screen reading software.• Use tactile graphics or 3D models to support understanding.• Provide tactile diagrams or textured materials.• Utilize magnification devices or large print materials.• Utilize audio descriptions or verbal cues to supplement visual information.• Use assistive listening devices or FM systems.• Provide recorded versions of text or digital audio books.
Hearing Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use visual aids, gestures, and facial expressions to support communication.• Provide visual schedules, written instructions, and captions for videos.• Utilize visual timers or vibrating alerts for time management.• Make use of hearing aids or cochlear implants, ensuring they are functioning properly.• Provide access to personal FM systems or sound amplification devices.• Use captioning or sign language interpretation for audiovisual materials.• Face the student and maintain eye contact when speaking.• Speak clearly and at a moderate pace, without exaggeration.• Break down complex information into smaller chunks.• Collaborate with the students Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) and other specialists to support language development.

Strategies by Disability

DISABILITY	STRATEGIES
Speech Language Impairment (SLI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborate with the speech language pathologist (SLP) to understand the student's individual needs and specific speech goals.• Encourage and model effective communication; use clear and concise language.• Model correct pronunciation, grammar and sentence structure.• Utilize visual supports such as visual aids, cues, prompts, to support comprehension and communication.• Provide opportunities for communication in different settings.• Encourage the student to express themselves through sign, gestures, pictures, or alternate communication systems if applicable.• Praise student's efforts in communication and provide specific feedback.• Use positive reinforcement to motivate and encourage student's progress.• Create a supportive environment that fosters communication and actively listen to the student's attempts to communicate.
Physical Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure classroom accessibility by arranging furniture and materials to accommodate mobility devices.• Modify tasks and assignments to match the student's physical abilities.• Provide assistive technology or adaptive equipment such as specialized keyboards or pencil grips.• Collaborate with the physical therapist, occupational therapist and other specialists to implement appropriate strategies.• Encourage peer support and inclusion in classroom activities.

Accommodations Vs. Modifications

	Accommodations	Modifications
<u>Definition</u>	Adjustments that enable students to access and participate in the general education curriculum without altering its content or standards.	Changes to the content, curriculum, or grading standards to meet the student's individual needs. The special education teacher or general education teacher usually modifies the curriculum. This is typically for students who are performing 2-3 years below grade level.
<u>Purpose</u>	To support students' learning and independence by removing barriers and providing necessary assistance or tools.	Adapt instruction to meet the student's abilities and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities
<u>Examples:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential seating near the teacher or the front of room • Visual aids, timers or schedules • Extended time for assignments • Use of assistive technology like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speech to text (i.e. student dictates what they want to say into the computer) • text to speech (i.e. computer reads text to students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifying assignments or tests (i.e. on a math test where students are supposed to solve 2-digit addition problems, changing the test to have the student solve 1-digit addition problems). • Modifying reading materials to an appropriate reading level. • Adjusting the complexity or length of tasks • Altering grading criteria or expectations
<u>Responsibility</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Teacher • Paraprofessional • General Education Teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Teacher • General Education Teacher

Sample Accommodations

Here are a list of some sample IEP accommodations that you might provide in a classroom. Remember, accommodations should be determined based on the individual student's needs and in collaboration with the student's IEP team. Regular communication and feedback are essential for implementing and monitoring the effectiveness and promoting student success.

Type	Examples	Sample Scripts
Preferential Seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide preferential seating wherever the student works best. (i.e. near the front of the classroom, near the teacher, or away from distractions).• Pull the student or a group of students to the side table to do some reteaching or small group teaching of the lesson.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I noticed that you can concentrate better when you sit in the front row. Let's make sure you have a seat there to help you stay focused on the lesson."• "I noticed that you might benefit from some extra support and practice with (task). Let's head over to the side table where we can work together on this."
Graphic Organizers/ Sentence Starters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide graphic organizers to help students visually organize their thoughts and ideas for writing assignments, note taking or planning projects• Provide sentence starters for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I can provide you with a graphic organizer to help you..."• "Let's use a graphic organizer to visually organize your thoughts on..."• "Here are some sentence starters you can use to help you start on your writing."
Checklists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create checklists or task lists to help students break down assignments or tasks into manageable steps.• You can use a post it note, white board, or blank sheet of paper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Here's a checklist to help you break down this assignment into smaller steps."• "We can use a checklist to help you keep track of the tasks you need to complete."

Sample Accommodations

Type	Examples	Sample Scripts
Highlighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use highlighting tools to draw attention to important information in texts or worksheets. This supports reading comprehension and helps students locate key details. • Write out sentences or letters with highlighter and have students trace the highlighter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We can use a highlighter to highlight important information in the text such as..." • "Let's highlight key details or important sections in the text to help you focus."
Drawing Lines or Providing Alternate Paper for Handwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some worksheets do not come with lines on it. This makes it difficult for students with fine motor difficulties to write neatly. • Draw lines or provide alternate paper to assist students in maintaining neat handwriting and organizing their work on the page. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I can draw straight lines for you to write on, so your handwriting stays neat." • "Here's a template with lines to help you keep your writing organized." • "Before you start, let me draw some lines for you to write neatly on the page."
Read Aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud instructions, texts, or assignments to students who may struggle with reading independently. • This promotes access to information and supports comprehension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "If you like, I can read the instructions aloud to you so you can better understand them." • "Would you like me to read this passage and questions aloud to you?"
Speech to Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can use the speech to text feature in google docs. Go to tools, voice typing and allow microphone. • Students can dictate what they want to write. • Make sure this accommodation is written in a student's IEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "You have lots of great ideas, but sometimes I notice that it is difficult for you to write them down because spelling the words is tricky. Would you like to use speech to text?"

Sample Accommodations

Type	Examples	Sample Scripts
Visual Cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use visual cues such as visual schedules, visual timers, or visual prompts to provide structure, reinforce routines, and support students' understanding of expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Let's use a visual schedule to help you stay on track throughout the day." "We can use visual prompts to remind you of important steps or expectations." "Let's draw some helpful visual reminders to put on your desk."
Near point Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students struggle to copy information from the board. Provide a copy of notes or write what the student has to copy on a small whiteboard and place it directly in front of them on their desk to make it easier to copy onto their paper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Would you like me to write the notes on this whiteboard and place it on your desk, so you don't have to keep looking up at the board?"
Specific Positive Reinforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a system of positive reinforcement to motivate and encourage students. Provide frequent and specific praise, rewards, or incentives to recognize their efforts and achievements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I really liked how you got started on your math worksheet right away! Awesome job." "You were reading so quietly during independent reading time. That made your teacher feel good."
Note-Taking Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide copies of notes or allow the student to use a note-taking buddy to ensure they have accurate and complete information for studying and review. You can ask the teacher for a copy of notes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I can provide you with a copy of my notes or a note-taking buddy to support your note-taking." "Would you like some assistance with taking notes during this lesson?"

Sample Accommodations

Type	Examples	Sample Scripts
Breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the student to take short breaks during tasks or activities to help them manage their energy, reduce fatigue, and maintain focus and attention. • Teach the student to recognize when they need a break and request a break using words or a picture card they can hand to an adult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Let's plan for regular breaks to give you some time to rest, recharge, and refocus." • "Would you like to take a short break to stretch or take a walk before we continue with the next activity?" • "I am noticing you may need a break."
Take Assessments/ Assignments in Separate Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may require a quiet, less distracting environment to take a test or complete an assignment. • Identify ahead of time a designated area for students to go to that allows students to focus and fully engage in the task. • Students can work at their own pace with reduced external pressure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "For this test, we have a separate setting arranged for you so that you can focus without any distractions." • I know you work best in a quieter environment so let's head to the "Learning Center" where you can give your best effort." • "Would you like to complete this math quiz in the "Learning Center?"
Additional Response Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the student extra time to process information, complete assignments, or respond to questions. • This accommodation recognizes their individual processing needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Take your time to process the question and provide your response when you're ready." • "I understand you may need extra time, so feel free to take your time completing the assignment."
Visual Timers or Reminders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize visual timers or visual reminders to help the student manage their time effectively, stay on task, and transition between activities. • Give time warnings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am going to set the timer for 10 minutes. When the timer goes off, it will be time to stop working." • "You have 1 more minute until we stop and clean up."

Sample Accommodations

Type	Examples	Sample Scripts
Masking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence strip masking: using a sentence strip or notecard to cover up all but one sentence or a few lines of text on a page. • Covering everything except one paragraph so that the student reads one paragraph at a time. You can have them stop and check for understanding. • Covering up math problems on a page with a blank sheet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a sentence strip that will help you focus on one sentence at a time. We will move it down as you read each sentence." • "For this assignment, let's focus on one paragraph at a time. I will use this window mask to cover up the rest of the page so you can give your full attention to the paragraph we are working on."
Scribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student dictates their thoughts, responses, or answers during classroom activities, assessments, or assignments and an adult writes them down. • This is great for assignments that are not specifically testing writing like short answer responses on a science or social studies test. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'll be your scribe for today. Just tell me your thoughts and I will write them down. • "For the short answer questions, you can say your answers out loud, and I will write them down for you." • "Let's brainstorm some ideas. You can tell me your thoughts and I will write them down."
Flexible Seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accommodation of flexible seating allows students to have alternative seating options. Traditional desks and chairs may not be the most comfortable or conducive for learning. • Examples: Yoga ball, standing desk, wiggle stool or floor cushion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I noticed that you enjoy moving around while you are working. Would you like to use this wiggle stool as your seating option today?" • "I noticed that you prefer to stand while working. We have a standing desk available if you prefer to stand while you work."

Behavior Intervention Plans

A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is an important tool used in special education to help address and support students who exhibit challenging behaviors. While not all students will have a BIP, it is essential for educational aides to understand its purpose and how to implement it effectively when needed.

What is a BIP?

A Behavior Intervention Plan is a formal, individualized plan created by the IEP team—including parents, teachers, and specialists—to outline strategies for addressing specific behavioral concerns. The goal is to reduce problem behaviors, teach positive alternatives, and support student success.

Key Components of a BIP:

- **Identified Behaviors:** A clear description of the behaviors that need to be addressed.
- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** An explanation of what may be triggering the behaviors and why the student engages in them (e.g., to seek attention, avoid tasks, gain items, or for sensory input).
- **Behavior Goals:** Measurable goals outlining the desired replacement behaviors or skills the student is working toward.
- **Strategies and Supports:** Specific interventions to prevent problem behaviors and encourage positive ones. This may include prompts, rewards, routines, and accommodations.
- **Progress Monitoring:** Data is collected regularly—often through tracking sheets provided by the special education teacher—to evaluate progress toward behavior goals.
- **Crisis and Safety Plans:** Steps to follow in the event of a severe behavioral episode to ensure the safety of the student and others.
- **Collaboration:** Ongoing communication among all team members is essential to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

Your Role as an Educational Aide:

- Follow the BIP consistently during all parts of the school day.
- Use the outlined strategies and supports to help the student succeed.
- Monitor and document behavior data as directed by the teacher.
- Communicate regularly with the teacher about what is working and what may need adjusting.
- Remain calm, supportive, and positive in your interactions.

By understanding and implementing BIPs, you play a key role in helping students build self-regulation skills and thrive in a supportive learning environment.

ABC Data and Functions of Behavior

What is ABC Data?

ABC stands for **Antecedent, Behavior, and Consequence**—a tool used to collect information about what happens before, during, and after a behavior. This data helps identify patterns or triggers that lead to certain behaviors and what responses may be reinforcing them.

- **Antecedent** – What happened *before* the behavior?
- **Behavior** – What exactly did the student do?
- **Consequence** – What happened *after* the behavior?

By tracking ABC data, you help the team understand the context of behaviors and make informed decisions about how to best support the student.

Functions of Behavior

Every behavior happens for a reason. Understanding the *function* helps us respond in ways that reduce problem behaviors and encourage positive ones. Common functions include:

- **Escape or Avoidance:** The student is trying to avoid or get out of a task, situation, or demand.
- **Attention-Seeking:** The student wants attention from peers or adults—this could be positive or negative attention.
- **Access to Items or Activities:** The student is trying to get something they want, such as a toy, snack, or preferred activity.
- **Sensory or Self-Stimulation:** The behavior meets a sensory need, such as rocking, tapping, or humming to feel calm or regulated.

Your Role as an Aide:

- Observe and help collect ABC data when asked.
- Report behaviors factually and consistently.
- Use strategies that align with the student's behavior plan.
- Work closely with the special education teacher to understand and support the function of each student's behavior.

By using ABC data and recognizing the purpose behind behaviors, you help create meaningful, individualized support plans that encourage positive behavior and help students succeed in the classroom.

Data Collection

Importance of Data Collection:

Data collection is a vital component of the special education process, providing valuable insights into students' progress, needs, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. By systematically collecting and analyzing data, the team can make informed decisions to tailor interventions, set appropriate goals, and ensure personalized learning experiences for each student. Accurate and reliable data collection empowers the team to track student growth, collaborate with colleagues, and advocate for necessary resources and supports.

Types of Data:

There are various types of data that you might collect in the special education classroom such as:

- academic assessments
- behavior observations
- social interactions
- progress monitoring on IEP goals

Quantitative data, such as test or quiz scores, numerical records, words per minute read, provide measurable indicators of student performance.

Qualitative data, on the other hand, captures descriptive information, including anecdotal notes, student work samples, and behavior narratives. Both types of data complement each other, offering a comprehensive picture of students' strengths, challenges, and progress over time.

Ethical Considerations:

When collecting and storing data in the special education classroom, it is crucial to maintain strict confidentiality and adhere to ethical guidelines. Educators must ensure that data is only accessible to authorized personnel and used solely for educational purposes.

Remember, effective data collection serves as a cornerstone for evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement, promoting the overall success of students with special needs. Please consult with your supervising teacher for training on how to collect data as each data sheet will look a little different depending on the student and their goals.

Data Collection

Behavior Data:

Behavior data is an essential tool for understanding and supporting students' social and emotional development. Various types of behavior data, such as frequency, duration, and intensity, offer valuable insights into behavioral patterns.

Frequency data tracks how often a specific behavior occurs within a given time frame. It helps identify trends and patterns in a student's behavior, revealing if certain behaviors are increasing or decreasing over time.

Duration data measures how long a behavior lasts from start to finish. This data can be particularly useful for understanding behaviors that may interfere with learning or social interactions.

Intensity data gauges the severity or magnitude of a behavior. It helps educators assess the impact a behavior may have on the student and their peers.

Latency data measures the time between a specific event or instruction and the initiation of a behavior. This data can be vital in identifying any delays in response or task initiation.

Interval data involves observing and recording behaviors during predetermined intervals. This method is beneficial when tracking multiple behaviors over time efficiently.

By collecting and analyzing various behavior data types, educators can develop targeted interventions and individualized support plans to foster positive behavior and enhance the overall learning environment. Understanding these different data types empowers teachers and staff to make informed decisions that lead to positive behavioral outcomes for their students.

Transitions

Transitions are the times when students move between activities, tasks, or locations throughout the school day. While many students handle transitions easily, others—particularly those with disabilities—may find them difficult.

Students may struggle with transitions for a variety of reasons, including changes in routine, sensory sensitivities, difficulties with executive functioning, or challenges in managing emotions. These factors can make it hard for them to shift focus, adjust to a new setting, or understand what's expected next.

Educational aides play an important role in helping students navigate transitions. Providing clear instructions, maintaining structure, and using consistent routines can help ease the process. It's also important to consider individual strategies that meet the specific needs of each student to support a calm and positive transition.

Here are some helpful strategies you can use:

Prepare and Communicate

- Review the visual schedule with students to help them understand what's coming next.
- Provide advance warnings before transitions (e.g., "You have one minute before it's time to close your computer.")
- Clearly explain expectations and any changes to the routine (e.g., "Tomorrow you'll have a guest teacher. The expectations will remain the same, and here's what you can expect...")

Use Visual Supports and Cues

- Incorporate tools such as visual schedules, checklists, or social stories to help students understand the transition process.
- Use visual cues or prompts to signal when an activity is starting or ending.
- Display visual timers or countdowns to show how much time remains before a transition.

Provide Predictability and Structure

- Maintain a consistent daily routine and schedule to help students feel secure.
- Use verbal or visual cues to give advance notice of upcoming transitions.
- Offer countdowns (verbal or visual) to signal the end of an activity.

Offer Transition Support Strategies

- Break transitions into smaller, manageable steps and explain each one clearly.
- Allow students to use transition supports, such as a familiar object they can carry between spaces.
- Practice transition routines in a structured, supportive environment to build confidence and understanding.

Building Relationships

Creating strong, respectful relationships with students is key to fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Students are more likely to engage and respond positively when they feel safe and valued. The following tips can help you build trust and meaningful connections with the students you support:

Be Approachable

Maintain a warm and welcoming demeanor. Smile, use open body language, and show genuine interest in each student. Make time to talk and listen actively to their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.

Build Rapport

Get to know students by talking with them about their interests, hobbies, and experiences outside of school. Finding common ground—even something small—can go a long way.

Example: “You like the color green? Me too!” or “You play tennis? That’s awesome—I love tennis as well!”

Show Empathy and Understanding

Acknowledge students’ feelings and experiences. Let them know you care by listening with empathy and validating what they’re going through. This builds emotional trust and connection.

Be Patient and Flexible

Relationships take time. Be patient and give students space to build trust at their own pace. Flexibility in your approach helps meet individual needs and builds comfort over time.

Use Positive Reinforcement

Praise effort, celebrate strengths, and acknowledge positive behavior. Specific, genuine feedback helps build confidence and motivation.

Remember the 4:1 rule—aim for four positive interactions for every one corrective one.

Engage in Shared Activities

Join in on classroom games, projects, and activities. Your involvement shows students that you're part of their team and strengthens your bond through shared experiences.

Encourage Collaboration

Promote teamwork by supporting group activities and discussions. Help students learn to work together, solve problems, and build social skills.

Respect Individual Differences

Every student is unique. Value and celebrate diversity in abilities, backgrounds, and perspectives. Show respect and appreciation for what makes each student special.

Maintain Professional Boundaries

While it's important to connect with students, always maintain professional boundaries. Follow school policies and remember your role as a support staff member.

Building Relationships Contin.

Here are some effective ways to build strong relationships at the start of the year, along with example phrases you can use:

Greet with Warmth and Positivity:

Example: "Good morning/afternoon, [Student's Name]! It's great to see you today. How are you feeling?"

Practice Active Listening:

Example: "I'm here to listen, [Student's Name]. Tell me about your favorite things to do."

Connect Through Shared Interests:

Example: "I heard you enjoy [interest/activity]. That's something I'm interested in too! Can you tell me more about it?"

Give Encouragement and Praise:

Example: "You did an awesome job on [task/assignment]. I'm really proud of your effort!"

Support Problem-Solving Together:

Example: "If you run into any challenges, we'll figure it out together. You're not alone."

Respect Personal Space and Boundaries:

Example: "I want you to feel comfortable. Let me know if you need some space or if there's anything specific I can do to help."

Share Appropriate Personal Stories:

Example: "I remember when I [shared experience]. Do you have any stories you'd like to share with me?"

Celebrate Successes:

Example: "Congratulations on [achievement]! You worked hard and should be proud."

Be Patient and Understanding:

Example: "Learning new things can be tough, but I believe in you. Let's take it one step at a time."

Show Empathy and Kindness:

Example: "It's okay to have different feelings. I'm here to support you no matter what." / "I understand why you're upset. I'd probably feel the same."

Join in Classroom Activities:

Example: "Would you like to work on this activity together? We'd make a great team!"

Use Humor When Appropriate:

Example: "You have such a great sense of humor! I love it when you make us laugh."

Remember and Celebrate Important Dates:

Example: "I heard your birthday is coming up soon. Happy early birthday!"

ALL BEHAVIOR IS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION

- Paul Watzlawick

Students who display challenging behaviors are often trying to express their needs, feelings, or difficulties through their actions. When supporting a student exhibiting challenging behavior, it's important to ask yourself, "What is this student trying to communicate?" Understanding that behavior is a form of communication helps us shift our focus away from just discipline or control. Instead, we aim to identify the underlying causes and respond with empathy and care.

**Here are some things students might be
expressing through their behavior:**

ANXIETY OR FEAR

DIFFICULTIES WITH COMMUNICATING
WANTS, NEEDS, FEELINGS

FRUSTRATION OR LACK
OF COPING SKILLS

LACK OF SLEEP

DISCOMFORT OR DISTRESS

LACK OF SOCIAL SKILLS OR PEER
RELATIONSHIPS

NEED FOR CONTROL

SEEKING ATTENTION FROM PEERS,
OR TEACHERS

SENSORY SENSITIVITIES AND
OVERSTIMULATION

Behavior Strategies Cheat Sheet

Quick Behavior Strategies Cheat Sheet

When working with students who show challenging behaviors, having easy-to-use strategies can make a big difference. Here are some practical tips to keep in mind:

Reinforce Positive Behavior:

Give specific and timely praise for good behavior. Use rewards or tokens consistently to encourage positive actions.

Use Visual Supports:

Incorporate visual schedules, cue cards, or timers to help students understand expectations and transitions. Visual charts or token boards can track progress and motivate students.

Provide Clear Instructions:

Give simple, clear directions. Break tasks into smaller steps to help students feel successful and avoid overwhelm.

Offer Choices:

Give students appropriate choices to boost their independence and engagement. Make sure choices fit within acceptable behaviors and tasks.

Create Structured Routines:

Set up predictable daily routines and communicate them clearly. Use visuals to help students move smoothly through activities and transitions.

Teach Self-Regulation Skills:

Model and teach calming techniques like deep breathing, counting to ten, or taking a break to help students manage emotions and behaviors.

Use Proximity and Redirection:

Stay nearby to support and monitor students. Calmly redirect attention to positive activities when needed.

Set Clear Expectations:

Clearly state and consistently reinforce behavior expectations. Use visuals or reminders to help students know what's expected in different settings.

Incorporate Breaks and Sensory Supports:

Offer scheduled breaks or sensory activities to help students reset. Provide tools like fidgets or noise-cancelling headphones if needed.

Remember, every student is different. Tailor these strategies to fit each student's unique needs and behavior plans. Stay in regular communication with the teacher and work together for a consistent approach.

De-escalation Tips

As an educational aide working with special education students, it's important to know how to use de-escalation strategies to help during challenging moments. Here are some helpful tips:

Stay Calm:

Keep a calm and steady presence to model self-control and provide reassurance.

Examples: "I see you're upset right now. Let's both try to stay calm." or "I can tell you're frustrated. Let's take a deep breath together."

Create a Safe Environment:

Make sure the space is safe and free from anything that might trigger or distract the student.

Examples: "Let's check that the area around us is safe and clear." or "I'm here to help keep this space safe for you."

Give Space:

Respect the student's personal space and allow them room to settle. Avoid crowding or sudden movements.

Examples: "I'm going to step back a little to give you some space." or "Take your time to calm down, and let me know when you're ready to talk."

Use a Calm and Supportive Voice:

Speak softly and gently to show empathy and understanding. Avoid shouting or harsh language.

Examples: "I'm here to listen and support you. Let's talk calmly." or "I know you're upset, but please use a calm voice."

Validate Feelings:

Acknowledge the student's emotions and let them know it's okay to feel that way. Show understanding and care.

Examples: "I see that you're feeling angry/frustrated/sad. It's okay to feel that way. I'm here to help." or "This situation is hard, and I would feel upset too."

More de-escalation tips continue on the next page.

De-escalation Tips Continued

Active Listening:

Give the student your full attention, maintain eye contact, and listen carefully to their concerns or frustrations without interrupting.

Examples: "I'm here to listen. Can you tell me what's bothering you?" or "I want to understand what you're feeling. I'm listening."

Offer Choices:

Provide the student with options to help them feel in control and more autonomous. Make sure the choices are appropriate for the situation.

Examples: "Would you like to take a short break or keep working? It's up to you." or "I know you're upset. Would you rather talk now or after you've had some time to calm down?"

Redirect Attention:

Help shift the student's focus by guiding them to a calming activity or something they enjoy.

Examples: "Do you want to talk about your favorite Mario level?" "What do you like to build in Minecraft?" or "Let's try this activity together—it might help distract you."

Teach Self-Regulation Techniques:

Show and practice calming strategies like deep breathing or counting to help students manage their emotions.

Examples: "When we feel overwhelmed, deep breaths can help us calm down. Let's try it together." or "I know a trick called counting to ten that might help. Want me to show you?"

Seek Support When Needed:

If the situation requires extra help, reach out to the special education teacher or other professionals to ensure safety and support.

Examples: "To handle this the best way, I'm going to get [teacher/support staff] to assist us." or "It's important we have some extra help. I'll ask [teacher/staff member] to join us."

Remember, each student is different, so tailor de-escalation techniques to fit their unique needs. Collaborate closely with the special education teacher and team members to develop effective strategies. Ongoing training in de-escalation will strengthen your ability to support students effectively.

Use of CPI Holds:

CPI holds are a last-resort strategy and should only be used when a student poses an immediate risk of harm to themselves or others. The safety and dignity of the student must always be the top priority.

Hands-Free Building Approach:

Our school is committed to being a hands-free building whenever possible. This means that physical interventions, including holds, should be avoided except in emergencies. Instead, focus on using de-escalation techniques, verbal strategies, and environmental supports to prevent situations from escalating. This approach promotes a safer and more respectful environment for students and staff.

Error Correction

Understanding Error Correction

Error correction is a strategy used to guide and support students when they make mistakes. The goal is not to punish or criticize, but to help students learn and grow from their errors.

In our classrooms, error correction is used as a *last step* after proactive supports have already been put in place. These proactive strategies include using visual cues, gestures, prompts, and other tools to help students understand tasks and expectations. The purpose of these strategies is to prevent errors and support independence.

If mistakes still occur, error correction helps students recognize what went wrong and how to improve. It includes giving clear, specific feedback, encouraging students to reflect on their actions, and providing chances to try again.

It's important to always approach error correction in a kind and respectful way. We want every student to feel safe taking risks and learning from mistakes. Our focus is on building confidence, resilience, and a growth mindset—while celebrating progress and effort along the way.

Please see the next pages for real examples of how to apply error correction with various student behaviors.

Note: Every student is unique, and it may take time and practice before you feel confident using error correction strategies. That's okay. Stay consistent, work with your classroom team, and remember that your support makes a big difference.

Error Correction: Math Mistake

When helping students correct mistakes, it's important to stay calm, positive, and focused on growth. Here are some example phrases and approaches you can use when providing error correction:

Maintain a Calm and Encouraging Tone:

"[Student's Name], I noticed a small mistake on your worksheet. That's okay—let's work through it together."

Give Clear, Specific Feedback:

"Remember, we always start by multiplying in this type of equation. Let's try that step again."

Offer Guidance and Support:

"Let's take another look. Can you go back to the step where it got tricky and see what might have gone wrong?"

Model the Correct Response:

"You're close! Instead of multiplying here, we should add. Let's go through it together."

Acknowledge Correct Thinking:

"Nice work! That's the right answer. I'm proud of how you stayed focused and figured it out."

Encourage Continued Practice:

"Now that you've got it, let's try a few more like this. Mistakes help us grow, and you're doing great."

Provide Positive Reinforcement:

"I really appreciate how hard you're working and your positive attitude. Keep it up—you're making great progress."

Important Reminder:

Every student is different, and these examples should be adjusted to fit each student's learning style and needs. Always approach error correction in a respectful, supportive way that encourages growth, resilience, and confidence.

Error Correction: Shouting Out

Responding to a Student Who Shouts Out in Class

When a student calls out during class, it's important to respond in a calm and respectful way while reinforcing classroom expectations. Below is a sample approach you can follow:

Remain Calm and Use a Neutral Tone:

"[Student's Name], I heard you call out just now. Let's take a moment to talk about it."

Clearly State Expectations:

"In our classroom, we raise our hands and wait to be called on. That helps everyone have a fair chance to participate and keeps things respectful."

Acknowledge the Student's Intentions:

"I know you were excited to share, and I appreciate your enthusiasm. It's just as important to follow the classroom rules."

Provide an Alternative:

"Next time, try raising your hand and waiting to be called on. That way, your teacher knows you're ready to share."

Reinforce Positive Intentions:

"I can tell you're really interested in the lesson, and that's great! Raising your hand shows you're respectful of your classmates and ready to contribute."

Redirect Gently:

"Let's get back to the lesson. If you have something to say, go ahead and raise your hand so we can hear your ideas."

Recognize Improvements:

"I noticed you raised your hand that time—great job! I'm proud of how you used the expected behavior."

Encourage Reflection:

"Let's think about what you can do next time to remember to raise your hand. What strategy might help you?"

Keep It Low-Key and Supportive:

Always address the behavior quietly and respectfully, without calling unnecessary attention to the student. The goal is to guide the student while protecting their dignity and supporting a positive learning environment.

Error Correction: Off Task Behavior

Responding to Off-Task Behavior

When a student becomes off-task, it's important to respond calmly and supportively to help them re-engage with the activity. The goal is to redirect their focus while maintaining a positive and encouraging tone. Use the sample prompts below as a guide:

Stay Calm and Neutral:

"[Student's Name], I noticed you're having a hard time focusing right now. Let's work together to get back on track."

Gently Redirect:

"Let's turn our attention back to [specific task or assignment]. We're working on this together."

Explain the Task's Importance:

"This task matters because [brief explanation of its purpose or connection to learning goals]. Let's keep moving forward so we can meet our goal."

Provide a Simple Reminder:

"Staying focused helps you make the most of your time and gives you more chances to succeed."

Offer Help and Tools:

"If this feels tricky right now, we can break it into smaller steps or use a visual support. I'm here to help."

Acknowledge Effort:

"I see you're trying to refocus—great job! Keep going, and let me know if you need help."

Reinforce Positive Behavior:

"Thanks for working to get back on task. That shows you're taking responsibility for your learning—nice work!"

Support Time Management:

"Let's make a quick plan—set a small goal, and then we can take a short break. That will help us stay focused and finish strong."

Important Note:

Every student is different. Be flexible and responsive to individual needs. When addressing off-task behavior, focus on guidance and encouragement rather than correction alone. Building a consistent and respectful approach supports a productive learning environment.

Common Acronyms in Special Education

Welcome to our special education community! We understand that the world of special education comes with its unique language of acronyms and terms. Here's a helpful guide to some common ones:

IEP (Individualized Education Program): A legal document outlining specific educational goals, services, and accommodations for students with disabilities.

Case Manager: The designated professional responsible for coordinating a student's special education services and ensuring the implementation of their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

FBA (Functional Behavior Assessment): A process used to analyze and understand the functions and triggers of a student's challenging behavior.

BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan): A plan designed to address and support students' challenging behaviors with strategies and interventions.

PT (Physical Therapy): Therapy provided by a licensed physical therapist to address motor skill development and mobility challenges.

OT (Occupational Therapy): Therapy provided by a licensed occupational therapist to address fine motor skills, sensory processing, and activities of daily living.

APE (Adapted Physical Education): Specialized physical education tailored to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

SLP (Speech-Language Pathologist): A licensed professional who provides speech and language therapy to address communication and speech disorders.

LRE (Least Restrictive Environment): The educational setting that provides appropriate support and services while allowing students with disabilities to be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible.

Professional Development

Why is Professional Development Important?

Professional development enhances your skills, knowledge, and effectiveness in supporting students with special needs. It keeps you updated on best practices and empowers you to provide high-quality education.

Tips for Seeking Learning Opportunities:

- **Set Goals:** Establish personal and professional goals to focus your learning efforts.
- **Be Proactive:** Actively seek out learning opportunities aligned with your goals.
- **Utilize Resources:** Access district-provided workshops, seminars, and training sessions.
- **Online Learning:** Explore reputable websites, webinars, and online courses for self-paced learning. Ask your supervising teacher for recommendations for online training (ex. Masterclass, AFIRM, IRIS etc.)
- **Collaborate with Peers:** Engage in discussions, share experiences, and learn from colleagues.
- **Reflect and Apply:** Regularly reflect on your practice and apply new knowledge in the classroom.
- **Utilize Technology:** Leverage educational apps, websites, and online resources for professional growth.

Encouraging a Learning Mindset:

Remember to embrace growth. Believe in your capacity for growth and improvement. Maintain a sense of curiosity and seek opportunities to expand your knowledge. Collaborate with teachers and specialists to learn from their expertise. Request feedback from colleagues or supervisors to identify areas for growth. Lastly, engage in self-reflection to assess your effectiveness and plan for improvement.