

What is a Student with Special Education Needs?

You may be familiar with this term or have heard about it and are not quite sure of its meaning and relevance to your role as a parent. The phrase “student with special education needs” refers to children who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for

them to learn than most children of the same age. A student with special education needs or “exceptional pupil²” may have a communicational, behavioural, intellectual, or physical exceptionality, or they may have multiple exceptionalities.

Learning Strategies

Some of the most useful strategies for people with special education needs come from Frontier College’s Student Centered Individualized Learning (SCIL) method, specifically the following points³:

- Learning is based on the needs of the learner, defined by the learner
- Every person can learn
- Learning begins with attention to the learner’s strengths and successes rather than deficiencies and failures

By keeping these three things in mind, working with a student with special education needs will be much easier. Encouragement and understanding are key when working with your child. Even small successes can make a difference to a child who frequently deals with failure and frustration. By pointing

out the student’s strengths, and not dwelling on their weaknesses, a sense of trust and a positive atmosphere emerge where the student can feel more at ease.

A student who has special education needs will also need help in other areas. Structure and sequence is very important. Have everything you will need ready before sitting down to work. Avoid jumping from one topic to another as this can cause confusion and frustration. As well, help your child with organizing their notes and planning for deadlines.

Other useful strategies include:

- Use visual aids, but make sure they are not distracting
- Try not to talk and write at the same time; write it down and then explain



- Speak slowly and give one instruction at a time (e.g., instead of saying, “Let’s work on pages 8-10 in the reader and then we’ll do these colouring pages” say, “Let’s turn to page 8 in the reader.”)
- Ensure the student fully understands any instructions or sequences; break it down into mini-steps if necessary and present them one at a time
- Provide lots of repetition and review
- Repeat or re-phrase material if not understood
- Have the student repeat or re-phrase the lesson or instruction
- Ensure the student is attentive before giving instructions or help
- Summarize key points and have the student copy or write them down
- Allow time for the student to think about what is being learned
- Give lots of feedback



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Learning Environment

Even if your homework area is not in an ideal location, there are some things that can help students with special education needs to better focus⁴:

- Reduce distractions. Face away from the main part of the room when working
- Keep work area clear—have only the required materials on hand
- Find a quiet area
- Build in success each visit
- Spend time organizing notebooks
- Ensure the child or youth knows what to do
- Allow the child or youth to pre-read a passage before practising orally
- Help the student to set up and use an agenda
- Provide immediate feedback on academic and social skills

