Module 5: Middle Child and Adolescent Special Educational Needs

What you will learn in this module:

5.1 Meeting Cognitive, Emotional, and Social Needs

5.2 Teaching Strategies

5.3 Collaboration

5.4 Improving Skills

5.5 Basic Differentiation

For students who were identified early in life, their Education Health and Care Plan (EHC) continues to be modified with new, challenging goals, and their progress being observed by educators and educational teams. Continued support in school and at home is promoted with the help of supplemental materials, diversified activities, and a large range of learning outcomes.

5.1 Meeting Cognitive, Emotional, and Social Needs

An interesting aspect that should be pointed out regarding the middle and adolescent school years is that there will be a number of students who were never identified in their early childhood education. These students are eligible for services. In fact, a large number of disabilities, particularly learning disabilities that deal with reading, writing, attention, focus, and arithmetic will become more observable in these later years.

In many ways these students are labeled as having "slipped through the cracks," meaning that they showed evidence of characteristics in line with identifiable special educational needs. However, it is important not to blame parents or their early school year educators.

The unique aspect of secondary education as opposed to early childhood education is that students are more aware of their learning styles. They are more conscious that they might be

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categorized as "different" by their peers, and more likely to become disengaged with their education due to the difficulties they encounter.

As you work with young adults, having a keen eye on how they perceive themselves, and their unique understanding of their situation is a great way to make them an active participant in their learning. Help them find strategies to make them feel valued, capable, and independent in a place they might otherwise feel ostracized or out of place.

In examining the three main areas that a majority of special educational students need support, educators can approach issues, struggles, and triumphs in ways that will promote and fuel learning, self-esteem, and skills.

5.1.1 Cognitive Needs

Between the ages of 10 through 18, young adults and adolescents go through a number of intellectual growths. Children in these age groups begin to have a greater understanding of the world around them, begin to form their own opinions, values, morals, and belief systems. Their ability levels are strongly encouraged by how well their brain processes and decodes information. This is not only a time when children's physical bodies undergo huge changes but their brains actually experience a physical change as well. In particular, the pre-frontal cortex of the brain is continuing to develop during this time. This affects executive functions like planning, reasoning, attention, decision-making, and understanding consequences.

If students are experiencing a disconnect or obstacle affecting this cognitive growth, or blocking their abilities such as a learning, intellectual, or communication disorder, they will find that these upper, more challenging grades in school are more difficult than they are prepared for.

Many regular education students tend to have minor difficulties with attention, memory, processing, and other cognitive skills. Therefore, imagine what difficulties will arise for students with special educational needs when it comes to performing tasks, and finding solutions for problems within the classroom.

Understanding the skills associated with cognition is the first step in discovering what to focus on, and how to support alternative methods of learning for students in need.

Skills Associated With Cognition:

Sustained attention: remaining focused on a particular task for a certain amount of time.	Selective attention: focusing on a task while being subjected to distractions.	Divided attention: known as "multi-tasking" or being able to pay attention to more than one task at a time.
Long-term memory: recalling past-learned information, such as spelling, facts, names, phone numbers, or understanding of situations.	Short-term memory: also called "working memory," this is when a person needs to hold onto information within a given time or while performing a task, like writing something down, repeating something someone said, or following instructions that were just given.	Logic and reasoning: problem solving, drawing conclusions, and analyzing how things connect in the world. For example, when students say they do not understand something, they need help, or do not know where to begin with a task, these would be signs of deficits in logic.
Auditory processing: the ability to analyze, blend, and produce sounds comes from cognitive abilities from within the brain. Fluency, comprehension, ability to read and understand words can be challenges associated with auditory processing.	Visual processing: looking at images and being able to perceive, analyze, and understand what is in front of you is due to the visual processing signals within our brain. By being able to create a visual image in the brain, they are able to visually process information. Children having difficulties with maps, instructions, math problems, and comprehension might be struggling with this.	Processing speed: being able to quickly perform complex and simple tasks alike is a cognitive skill. The brain must be able to perform simultaneously a number of higher order functioning procedures. When the brain processes things slowly, learning and understanding becomes challenging.

Here are the things to consider in addressing the cognitive needs of middle and adolescent students:

- learning often comes as the result of prior knowledge and experience.
- when students can make personal connections to material, it makes it more meaningful, and they are more willing and eager to learn.

- students are more likely to learn through active involvement and hands on approaches rather than through reading and storytelling.
- students can be active in setting their own goals for the present and for the future. Taking ownership over their life becomes important to them.

5.1.2 Emotional And Social Needs

When it comes to emotional and social needs of middle and adolescent aged students, they often stand on their own but can also go hand-in-hand. In fact, the way that young adults handle and respond to situations emotionally can have a direct impact on their social progress, and awareness. The ages between 10 and 18 years is full of physical and emotional growth. From puberty, to behavioral changes, to making and losing friends, these years can be rewarding, devastating, and terrifying for young people. The idea that children struggling with issues beyond the scope of traditional adolescence only adds to the stress of school for students with special educational needs.

It is important for individuals working with emotionally disturbed students to understand that their disorders are often deeply psychological and serious. It affects themselves, and often those around them which may include the other students in the classroom and the teacher. Emotional outbursts and hypersensitivity disorders can greatly affect the social lives, and the ability to make friends during these years when socialization is highly important. As educators, it is important to not only understand what to expect in terms of emotional and social disorders, but how to provide support to meet the needs of students overcoming these overwhelming obstacles.

Here are some telling behaviors that might point toward an emotional or behavioral disorder:

- not being able to learn and comprehend, yet issues cannot be explained by learning, intellectual, sensory, or health issues.
- trouble building and maintaining interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers.
- inappropriate behaviors like calling out, moaning, touching, screaming, or other out of place actions.
- excessively depressed mood that is consistently present.
- fear or anxieties related to school, students, and teachers.
- aggression or evidence of self-harm.
- hyperactivity demonstrated through short attention span and impulsive behaviors.
- withdrawal or disinterest in school, peers, or hobbies.
- immature behaviors.
- poor academic performance below grade level.
- self-centered attitudes.

- testing boundaries of independence, and defiance with authority figures.

Some emotional behaviors to be aware of are:

- Conduct Disorders: these deal with anti-social behavior. The hostile nature that is presented leads to the inability to socialize and make friends. These individuals often ostracize themselves from peers and establishment.
- Emotional Disturbances: anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and depression are categorized as emotional disturbances. These cannot be physically observed but are observable through disconnected interactions, missing school, academic issues, and loss of friends and peer support.
- Personality Disorders: clinical diagnosis of behaviors that deviate from the expected behaviors set forth by society. Diagnoses like schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, and dependent personality disorder fall under this category. They are very serious and must be treated by doctors, medication, and counseling.

Here are the things to consider in addressing the emotional and social needs of middle and adolescent students:
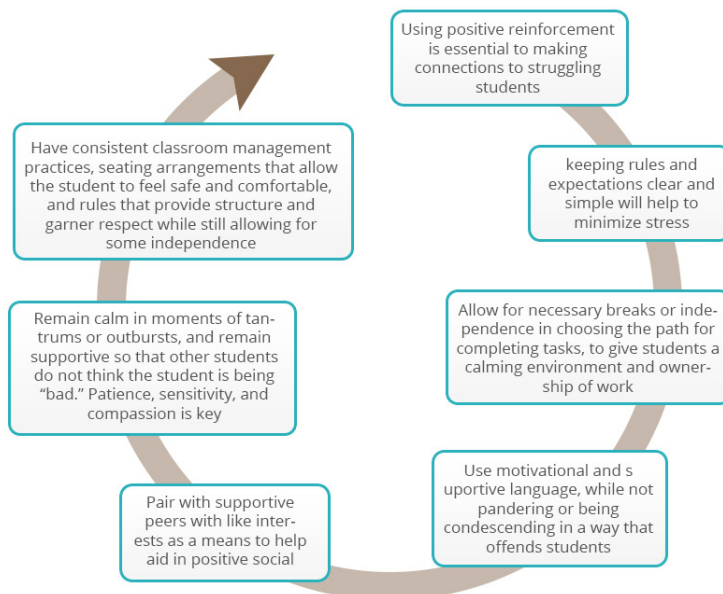
5.2 Teaching Strategies

A lot goes into creating lesson plans for the classroom, yet one of the most challenging tasks for teachers is to adapt those challenging lessons for individuals with special

educational needs; while still keeping the work rigorous. Teachers may ask themselves, "how can I ask a student with down syndrome to complete 8th grade word problems?" or "will my ADHD students be able to handle independently conducted group tasks?" or "will my psychologically disturbed pupil be able to process reading a novel that deals with heavy issues?" These are all very valid questions to ask oneself, and the answers to those questions are not always easy.

Under the law, special educational need students are protected. Through their EHC Plans, there are modifications put into place for teachers to follow. The modifications depend on the disability, and the unique qualities of the student. In fact, a down syndrome student would be exempt from 8th grade mathematical word problems. Their intellectual disorder makes them incapable of the higher order thinking that is required of the task. However, alternative number activities, and numerical tasks will be put in place. This task often rests on the shoulders of the general classroom and special educational need teachers.

Similarly, in order for ADHD students to succeed in a group setting, without being easily distracted, a particular set of teaching strategies would need to be put into play. The psychologically disturbed student's reading can be replaced with a similar, less emotional reading that assesses the same skill set being covered in the learning objective.

The interesting thing about teaching and strategies is that there is never just one foolproof approach. With so many different possible disorders or deficiencies, personality traits, motivation level, and the chemistry of the classroom as a whole, each student might need a different strategy applied in order to reach the end goal.

Throughout this module, we will explore the different types of learners you may encounter in your classroom, and some strategies to guide these students toward success.

5.2.1 Learning Styles

Every individual learns in different ways. Some people, in order to concentrate on a reading and retain information, need a quiet room without distraction, while others can only focus while listening to music or have background noise. Most people thrive from a variety of learning styles. They need written, visual, auditory, and hands on applications mixed together for the best results. When it comes to disabled students, figuring out their learning style is the first approach to creating a plan for delivering information.

Here are the 3 learning styles you will encounter in students with special educational needs:

- Auditory: traditional teaching methods tend to benefit these students the most. Talking directly to students, verbally giving instructions, and presenting information in lecture form are some ways to ensure these students receive information. Through tone of voice, body language, and

inflection of voice these students can maintain interest in classroom topics. These students work best in giving verbal responses, and presenting through conversation or speech in order to demonstrate knowledge.

- Kinesthetic: kinesthetic learners are those who need to experience something themselves to truly understand something. What this means is that they need to feel, touch, and experience material first hand to get the best results. Telling a kinesthetic learning how to complete a task is often useless. Instead, walk them through step-by-step as they complete the task. Hands-on will garner the greatest success.
- Visual: visual learners will have the most success when they have some kind of visual supplement to the information that is verbally being delivered in class. Whether it is through graphs, diagrams, pictures, or maps, having a visual reference to explain a concept or idea is key. Furthermore, presenting instructions and tasks on written, colorful, handouts with graphics can help these students to stay on task. A lot of visual learners benefit from to-do lists. Have them write down homework assignments and tasks so they can visualize what is asked of them. When completing assignments, these students like to produce in a way that "shows" rather than "tells." Similar to kinesthetic learners, they will do well in making diagrams or visual artwork to demonstrate their knowledge.

5.2.2 Approaches

Special educational needs pose a number of obstacles for educators looking to get an entire classroom full of diverse students to all reach the same learning objectives. **Here are some strategies to adapting lessons, and making modifications** to guide every student toward a greater level of thinking, participation, and understanding.

- **Identify expectations and instructions verbally,** in writing on the chalkboard, and in handout format for students to take home with them when they need to finish tasks.
- **Break assignments into small components** as not to overwhelm students; breaking into smaller pieces makes each task more approachable, and gives immediate satisfaction and motivation to continue on.
- **Communicate with parents by sending home reading calendars**, outlines of units, or bullet pointed lists of what students need to complete for class.
- When it comes to regular **classroom procedures, perform them consistently.** When it comes to classroom management, things like seating arrangements and sequence of events, like the use of initiations and closures, can cause stress and inefficiency when disrupted.
- **Develop reward systems** for a job well done.

- **Use auditory or visual indicators** when one task is done, and as a sign to move on to the next task. This can be in the form of PowerPoint slides, an egg timer, or an alarm sound on your phone.

- **Be flexible.** If a lesson is taking a lot of time for students to grasp, allow them that time and adapt the next few days or weeks to help them further understand concepts.
- **Allow students to have a creative outlet** in their assignments, whether for homework or major projects, bringing in artist elements like music, artwork, and theatrical performances can give students the opportunity to shine while they get excited about what they are learning.
- **Create supplemental materials t**o lectures, such as graphic organizers, charts, or visuals of some kind that guide the students toward the lesson in familiarized, structured, and consistent ways.
- **Incorporate technology** so students have a greater chance of success. This can be through videos, recorded lectures that can be replayed, websites that include reading and homework assignments, and the ability to type, rather than handwrite, work that must be submitted.

The key to teaching strategies is summed up in one major concept when working with special educational students; this concept is **patience**. Teachers and administrators must have patience when working with pupils who have learning, intellectual, communication, physical, or emotional disturbances or disorders. There must be patience given to lesson planning, to creating modifications, to brainstorming alternative methods of learning, and to speaking directly to students. Working with students with special educational needs in the middle and adolescent years can be one of the most rewarding jobs, and lifestyles out there.

At times, you may feel frustrated or you want to hold their hand through a task because you feel bad for the student. It is essential to remember that as frustrated as you may be; this student is likely frustrated with his or herself a majority of their day. Therefore, practicing patience, compassion, and guiding toward conclusions will make all the difference to the struggling students' educational experiences.

5.3 Collaboration

Collaborative strategies in special educational needs refer to integrating special educational students into the general education classroom. Within this classroom environment, regular classroom teachers and certified special education teachers work together in a team environment to help all students achieve their highest potential of learning.

Here are some collaboration models for including special educational needs in the regular education classroom:

- Lead Teacher Model: the regular subject area teacher leads the class while a special education teacher modifies, and presents supplemental material for students in need. The special education teacher will work closely in class with these students.
- Team Teaching: both the regular education teacher and special education teacher deliver material, and co-teach the class as equals. They both support all students during class time. Outside of class, the regular education teacher is responsible for the general education students' assignments. The special education teacher uses modified terms to score projects of the special education students. The ideal model is that someone could walk into this classroom and not know which teacher is the "lead" teacher and which is the "helper."
- Stations And Centers: the class is divided into groups or sections within the room, with each teacher delivering their own set of information. The students will rotate from one station to the next receiving alternating instruction from various sources.

- Resource Classrooms And Alternative Collaborative Setting: once the regular education teacher has covered material and it is time for students to work independently, the special education teacher takes the special educational need students, and moves them to an alternative setting or resource area to work one-on-one or in small focus groups.

5.4 Improving Skills

The goal of education is to prepare students for independent life beyond their adolescent years. While schools focus primarily on academics, their purpose reaches far beyond that. What are called "adaptive skills" are the result of an education. When working with students with special educational needs, it is essential to provide them with a skill base so that they can live a fulfilling life beyond secondary school, and living with their parents.

Unfortunately, not all children with disabilities will grow up to be independent. Some may live with their parents forever, some may end up residing in group homes catering to their care, and others may have full-time aids. These instances are most common for the students living with severe intellectual or physical disabilities. The majority of disabled adolescents will grow to live successful lives in which they work, live, and play.

Here are the adaptive skills that students must learn throughout their education:

- self-care skills
- communication skills
- self-direction
- social skills
- home and school living
- academics
- community life
- work life
- health and safety

Here are the best ways that educators and schools can facilitate the improvement of skills for students:

Provide opportunities for social interactions.

Identify students with disabilities and help them to receive services as soon as possible.

Teaching of physical tools and motor skills through activity and play.

Provide diverse opportunities for learning like small group, 1-on-1, large group, and independently.

Support students participation in creative outlets like art, music, theater in order to pursue interests and hone skills in alternative ways.

As discussed in the prior module, differentiation is the use of basic techniques to prepare instruction that meets the needs of all students. Whether students are identified as in need of special services or not; all students have the right to differentiated instruction to suit their learning styles.

Here are simple ways to ensure that students' learning styles are addressed in the classroom:

- **Visual Representations And Images**: using visual images for vocabulary lessons, allowing students access to the internet to find images that portray ideas or concepts, and presenting instructions in fun, visual symbols that facilitate learning will all be well received by every student in the classroom.

- **Collaboration Activities: putting students in mixed ability groups,** pairs, and participating in fish-bowl activities where they can have interactions with a variety of students can give them new perspectives, and new opportunities for learning.
- **Peer-Coaching: giving students partners or a variety of opportunities to work with one another,** and to mentor each other in areas of strength are great ways to take the intimidation out of doing class work.
  - **Multi-Sensory And Hands-On** Approaches: students are used to hands-on approaches in their science classes, but there is no reason that all classes cannot get creative to allow chances for students to get their hands dirty. In other words, you are reading 19th century romantic poets? Why not bring the students outside to experience first-hand some of the beauties of nature that the writers muse about.
  - **Assessments - Building O**n Strengths: providing students with rubrics created to outline what is expected of them is one way to differentiate. Another way is to create assessments that encourage success. Try to create assessments with a variety of multiple-choice, short answer, written response, or visual responses so that all students can find their niche, and do well.

Providing all students with the opportunity to learn is an ongoing process that every teacher needs to address when creating lessons for instruction. Constantly asking oneself, "will every student in the class have an opportunity to learn?" throughout lesson planning will help you to differentiate and mix things up. This ensures that students remain engaged, are motivated to work together, and are given the chance to excel where they may otherwise fail under traditional, and outdated techniques.

EXAM LINK