TATS & FIN Talk

VOLUME 4

Providing Individualized Services for Children with Disabilities

Identifying Children's Needs for Support

The keys to identifying and developing services and supports to address children's needs are observation and progress monitoring. Considering the busy and active nature of preschool classrooms, accomplishing meaningful observations might seem difficult, but developing a system for observing and noting the actions of children throughout the day will be helpful in progress monitoring so that adjustments can be made to meet student needs.

Noticing Delays and Taking Action

Teachers, along with family members, are often the first people to notice that developmental skills might not be progressing as anticipated in the young children they support and care for. Key factors include the following:

✚ While providing instruction and practice, it is important that teachers, caregivers, and family members maintain open and honest discussions about children's needs and that they seek reliable information to guide their next steps.

✚ It is important that the teachers and staff be aware of and follow district, agency, or school processes for screening when children enrolled in their specific programs experience continued difficulties even after supports and strategies are implemented.

If developmental concerns are caught early, the teacher or practitioner can help ensure that children receive the extra support they need while in care and that they are linked to the appropriate services.

Screening

Screening provides a quick snapshot of a child's health and developmental status and indicates whether further evaluation is needed to identify potential difficulties that might require interventions or special education services. Many programs have ongoing screening processes that make use of specific tools or checklists. Information gathered from these tools and checklists (along with information gained from observations and progress monitoring checklists) provides data that informs the staff and families about both successes and continued needs for certain supports.

School districts have the responsibility of ensuring that children ages 3 through 21 who are suspected of having a disability and are in need of special education and related services are identified, located and evaluated and that the evaluation process is at no cost to the parent or legal guardian (Section 300.111 of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) and Rule 6A-6.0331, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)). This process is known as child find.

The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS), in accordance with section 1006.03, Florida Statutes, (F.S.), may coordinate with school districts to provide assistance with child find. Among the services provided are sensory (vision and hearing), speech/language, and developmental screenings at no cost to the family. Service coordination for training, and family support is also provided. When the Child Find process reveals that there is a child that is potentially eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Child Find refers to the school district, which may lead to placement and services.

Assessment and Evaluation

As a part of the referral process following screening, a child may be evaluated by the local public school district to determine if they are eligible for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services. According to IDEA, the initial evaluation of a child must be "full and individual," (34 C.F.R. § 300.301) meaning that the evaluation includes assessments of all areas of suspected disability for an individual child. Written parental consent is required for evaluation.

Following the evaluation process, qualified professionals, along with the family, examine all results and determine if the child has a disability. Those children who are found eligible for ESE services will have an individual educational plan (IEP) written. The IEP describes the types of specially designed instruction, related services, accommodations, and supports that should be provided based on a child's strengths and needs. Written parental consent is required for IEP services to begin.

Individualizing Supports

In many cases, the strategies and accommodations detailed on a child's IEP are similar to the supports already implemented in the classroom. However, strategies and specialized instruction listed on a child's IEP must be implemented and the child's progress monitored as noted in the IEP. Children eligible for special education services frequently are also eligible for therapy (for example, speech and language therapy) or related services (such as occupational and physical therapy).

Individual supports, whether they are indicated on an IEP or incorporated into classroom activities for specific children, can be described in levels of intensity or individualization required for implementation. Best practice indicates use of supports and strategies needed to assist children in being successful and fully participating in activities with a goal of using the least intensive supports so that children develop independence.

The examples of levels and types of support below are listed from least intensive to most intensive.

✚ **Environmental Supports** include physical and visual cues for routines and activities, including arrangement of furniture into clearly defined areas.
  ▶ Examples: use pictures, photographs, labels, schedules, and clearly labeled areas for reminders and to indicate personal space

✚ **Activities** are shortened, broken into smaller segments, or adapted for accessibility.
  ▶ Examples: use visuals to indicate steps in activities, reduce the number of steps, help children get started, provide breaks

✚ **Materials** are chosen considering their placement, stability, ease of use, interest level, and correlation to lessons and activities.
  ▶ Examples: provide larger or easier to grasp materials, stabilize materials, use multiple kinds of surfaces

✚ **Instructional supports** help children attend to lessons and recall information.
  ▶ Examples: increase interest and attention with songs, rhymes, photos, or real-life objects; introduce multi-sensory activities such as movement, role-play, or puppets

✚ **Supports based on child preferences** address specific needs for transitioning and attending.
  ▶ Examples: provide transition objects for children to carry or hold, allow favorite toys, books, give transition cues

✚ **Peer support** includes peer buddies.
  ▶ Examples: allow help from peers, introduce items that require more than one person, teach peers how to be helpers, praise children for interaction

✚ **Adult support** includes increased interaction and modeling to increase participation. (This is not direct physical assistance.)
  ▶ Examples: facilitate play, model activities, engage with children in play scenarios, make positive comments, use praise that is descriptive, implement redirection during lessons

✚ **Direct assistance** involves an adult helping the child do an activity or routine.
  ▶ Examples: physically assist children who are unable to perform parts of certain tasks, help children during self-care routines, assist children with special equipment

✚ **Special equipment** is sometimes required to increase a child's access to activities and play areas.
  ▶ Examples: provide devices for mobility, sitting, stability, sensory input, adapted art materials, and writing materials

Least to Most

Reflect on the types of supports listed above in relation to the three children introduced in the following sections. Consider the level and types of adaptations and support strategies each will need in their inclusive classroom settings.

Meet Three Children

Florencia enjoys participating in play, art, and other classroom activities and watches peers when she does not understand directions; however, objects and photos should be used to teach vocabulary associated with activities. Specific praise and feedback will help Florencia gain confidence in both her ability to participate and her understanding of the activity. Florencia requires **visual and adult support** during instructional lessons, literacy, and social interactions to help her understand content, engage in play scenarios, and associate objects and photos with vocabulary. **Environmental supports** for Florencia include visuals for schedules and routines and photos to guide her through the steps of new activities.

Damon is learning to use his cane for orientation and learning how to use classroom materials. After receiving services in Early Steps prior to this third birthday, he was determined eligible for special education services with an IEP. Damon's evaluation team, family, and Early Steps providers recommended that his services be provided in an inclusive setting. Damon receives Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services; and he is also served by an itinerant teacher of the Visually Impaired (VI) who collaborates with his classroom teacher to determine needed supports and interventions. Damon's IEP specifies that he have access to brailled materials and tactile prompts along with guided practice to assist him in locating and using classroom materials. His **environmental support** includes safe arrangement of furniture and materials so that he can safely navigate to areas of the room and safely access materials. The teacher should provide guided practice for navigation skills. **Supports for using materials** include tactile and auditory cues throughout the room and during all activities and lessons. **Peer support** can be helpful to Damon and his unique needs should be explained to his classmates. Damon is likely to require significant assistance while he is becoming familiar with the classroom and adults should plan strategies for fading their assistance and increasing his independence.

Mark is eligible for special education services as a child with developmental delay (DD). He has difficulty comprehending language concepts but uses single words and short phrases to express his wants and needs, make comments, and answer simple questions. Mark's IEP accommodations include **environmental supports** such as visual schedules and simple first-then **visual scripts** to show him two parts of a schedule or two actions in a sequence. Clearly marked areas and a **special cushion or seat** help Mark remain in a designated area of an activity. Mark is provided headphones during Music and Movement and other activities that include increased noise or activity levels. He does not require adapted materials but he does require **movement and sensory breaks** at intervals during lessons and activities. To address his difficulty with language concepts Mark should be **pre-taught vocabulary** used during literacy lessons and be provided additional practice with language concepts through simple communication boards, photographs, and real objects. Next, Mark should be monitored for his response to various strategies. How much time he spends in group activities before tiring should be observed. When he at least partially follows directions, he should get specific feedback and be rewarded as he gets closer to his goal.

Using a UDL framework, each of the three children described above can be included in an early childhood setting with children without disabilities. Their needs can be met and their services can be provided using in-class supports. In fact, many of the services and supports will benefit other diverse learners who do not have disabilities.

For more information on providing individualized services in inclusive early childhood programs, contact your local TATS or FIN representative.

Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) — http://www.tats.ucf.edu
Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) — http://www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com