



## Overview of Specially Designed Instruction in IDEA

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), some preschool children (3 years of age through 5 years of age) who have undergone the evaluation process, may be determined eligible and in need of special education.

According to IDEA:

***Special education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.***

IDEA further defines *specially designed instruction* as:

(3) Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction –

(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and

(ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. [§300.39(b)(3)]



## Supports Under the Umbrella of Specially Designed Instruction

**Adaptations, modifications and accommodations** are all **types of support** given to preschool children with special needs under the overall umbrella of specially designed instruction. The terms are often used interchangeably but there is some agreement to their meaning and use.

For preschool children the differences in meaning and use may be more subtle, as they are working on a wide variety of developmental skills in many areas. In older children the differences may be more defined, as they are working on specific assignments and with specific materials.

When working with preschool children, it doesn't really matter what terminology you use. As long as you are carefully planning the individualized interventions and supports that the child needs to participate in the curriculum/activities and to make progress toward their IEP goals you're on the right track!

**Adaptations** - an overall term for any assistance required by a child with special needs to be successful or to experience the same opportunities as typically developing peers.

**Accommodations** - adaptations that help a child access or participate in the curriculum or activities without changing the curriculum or activity itself.

**Modifications** - adaptations that make changes to the curriculum or activity so that a child with special needs can participate and be successful.

### *Examples of adaptations for preschool children with special needs:*

- Modifying the physical environment
- Adapting materials
- Simplifying the activity (breaking it down, decreasing the number of steps)
- Using child preferences (favorite toy, favorite activity)
- Using special equipment or adapted devices
- Using adult support
- Using peer support

*\*Always remember\**

The special education process requires that **individual** supports and interventions for children be based on their strengths, weaknesses, and identified needs.

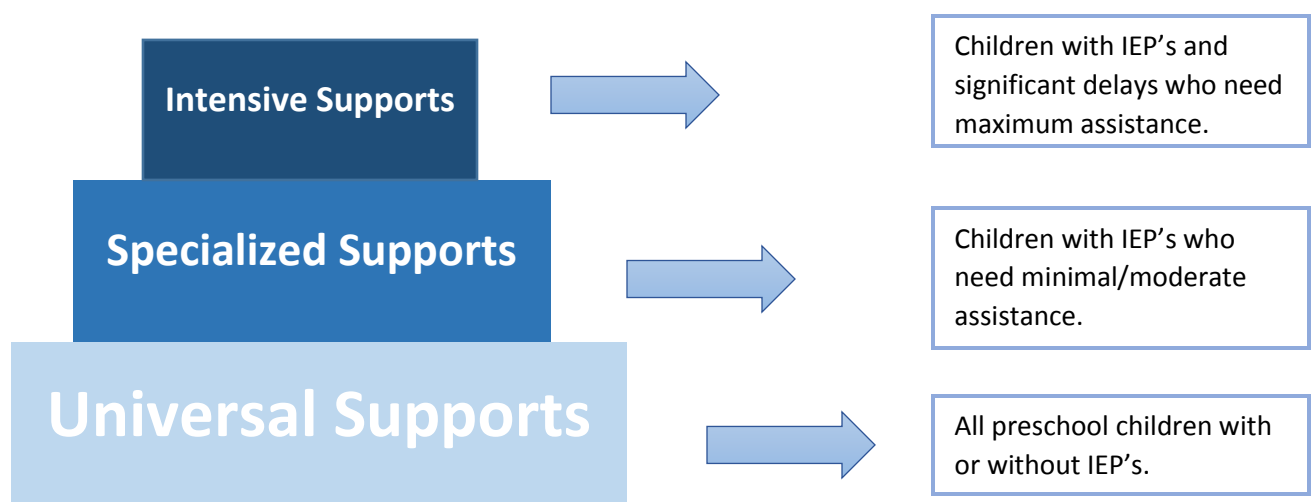
These should be reflected in the following sections of their Individual Education Plans (IEP):

- Present Levels of Performance,
- Goals and Objectives,
- Supports and Services,
- Accommodations

The IEP document should be referred to often when planning activities and instruction.

### *Levels of support Pre-K ESE:*

When planning interventions and supports, it is important to take into consideration the amount of assistance a child needs to be successful. In both general and special education, it is becoming common to use tiered support frameworks. These are referred to by many different terms. Again, when working with preschool children the terminology is not so important; but the concept of providing the correct amount and type of support to increase chances of a child's success is essential.



## *Descriptions and Examples of Tiers of Support*

**Universal Supports** are high quality early childhood strategies that can be used for all children, those that are identified as needing special education and typically developing children. These strategies take into consideration all learning styles and include the selection of curriculum, materials and resources that all children can use, providing support for diverse abilities, learning preferences, languages, and cultural backgrounds.

### Examples of Universal Supports:

- Presenting instruction in multiple ways (visual, auditory, tactile)
- Using classroom wide visual schedules
- Organizing the classroom to meet all children's needs
- Engaging children based on their interests and choices
- Repetition of verbal directions
- Increased wait time for responses

**Specialized supports** may be needed for children who have been identified as having delays in their development and needing special education. These supports may be used for children who need minimal to moderate assistance to meet their IEP goals and objectives and to access and participate in the preschool curriculum.

### Examples of Specialized Supports:

- Presenting instruction specific to child's learning based on IEP information, goals and objectives
- Using prompting levels specific to child's chances of success
- Using visuals specific to child's needs, goals and objectives
- Repetition of verbal directions along with additional support (prompts, visuals, etc.)
- Extended wait times along with prompting when response is not given or correct
- Specific organization of classroom, arrangement of classroom areas and/or materials

**Intensive supports** may be needed for a smaller subset of children who have been identified as having significant delays in their development and needing special education. These supports may be used for children who need maximum assistance to meet their IEP goals and objectives and to access and participate in the preschool curriculum.

### Examples of Intensive Supports:

- Presenting instruction specific to child's learning based on IEP information, goals and objectives, including break down tasks into steps
- Using high level of prompting and consistent prompting to complete tasks
- Using motivating and consistent reinforcement specific to the child
- Using modified or adapted materials/equipment that is specific to the child's needs
- Giving directions in the mode of communication the child uses (pictures, signs, gestures, etc.)

***All children have unique needs.***

Even children identified as needing special education vary greatly in the types and levels of assistance they need to be successful.

Their needs are ever changing and supports/interventions may need to be adjusted depending on the activity, goal, time of day, preferences, etc.

***It is important to ensure that a child does not become over dependent on adult or peer assistance and that the prompt levels used are always working toward independence.*** (Click on the link below for further information)

[Prompting Hierarchy -- Supporting Children in the Development of Independence](#) (pdf document)



Please take some time to explore our Topics of the Month as they will now include a ***Supports, Accommodations and Adaptations*** section, which provides more specific examples and resources.

**Additional Resources (links):**

Adapting Children's Learning Opportunities - DEC Recommended Practices - ECTA Center

Environmental Modification Examples - ONNECT - Community-fpg-unc.edu

**References:**

Supports, Modifications, and Accommodations for Students. Center for Parent Information & Resources

School Accommodations and Modifications. Ideas That Work. Office of Special Education Programs

Sandall, Susan R., Schwartz, Ilene S., *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs*, Brookes Publishing Co, 2008.

**Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)**  
3280 Progress Drive  
FAAST Center, Suite 250  
Orlando, FL 32826

**Tel: 407-823-3058**  
**Fax: 407-823-1360**  
**Email: [tats@ucf.edu](mailto:tats@ucf.edu)**  
**Website: <http://www.tats.ucf.edu>**

TATS is funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), through federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Part B, Section 619.