Characteristics, Signs, and Implications of Various Disabilities

Autism

Facts/characteristics about Autism
- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by a problem with the brain.
- The most affected areas are communication, behavior and social skills.

Possible signs of Autism
Child may...
- have challenges with social emotional, and communication skills.
- Have difficulty with transitions and with preferred activities.

Implications for learning environment
Child may...
- have trouble expressing needs or wants using typical words or motions
- have difficulty adapting to changes in school routine

Intellectual Disability (Mental Retardation)

Facts/characteristics about intellectual disability (mental retardation)
- intellectual disability (Mental Retardation) (MR) is a term used when there are limits to a child’s ability to learn at an expected developmental level and to function appropriately in daily life
- Some common causes are:
  - Down Syndrome
  - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
  - birth defects and infections
  - TBI (traumatic brain injury)
  - post-drowning.

Possible signs of intellectual disability
Child may...
- learn and develop more slowly that other children of the same age and need assistance with daily living skills
- have inappropriate behavioral and social skills

Implications for learning environment: intellectual disability
Child may...
- have trouble with gross and fine motor activities
- have poor expressive and receptive language skills
Language Disability

Facts about language disability
- More than 1 million of the children served in the public schools were categorized as having a speech or language impairment (effects 1 out of 10 individuals)
- Speech disorders refer to difficulties producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality
- Types of Language Disabilities
  - Stuttering (fluency disorder)
  - Problems with the way sounds are forms (articulation or phonological disorders)
  - Pitch, volume or quality of the voice’
  - Inability to understand words (receptive language)

Learning a second language is not a disability

Possible signs of language disability
Child may....
- not talk as much as their peers
- be unable to follow simple directions
  - Consider...
  - Be sure hearing has been checked
  - Frequent ear infections may impact both expressive and receptive language
- use ‘baby talk’ for prolonged periods
- Not be understood by familiar and unfamiliar adults
- use more gestures to communicate
- Jumble words together when speaking in sentences

Learning English is NOT a disability

Implications for learning environment: language disability
Child may...
- struggle with reading
- have difficulty understanding expressive language
- Lack adequate communication/ language skills which can result in acting out behaviors in the classroom
- Poor attention

Possible supports and adaptations
- Use short, clear sentences at child’s eye level
- Pictures
- signs or picture symbols for understanding and communicating needs/wants
- Choice Boards
- Schedule boards
- Pictures around the room for commenting or choice making
**Visual Impairment**

**Facts/characteristics about visual impairment**
- 85% of learning is visual
- Vision probably not a primary channel for learning
- Motor skills might be initially delayed
- Relies on verbal, tactile and auditory information
- Fragmented learning
- What can see might be different per child

**Types of impairment**
- Myopia (near-sightedness)
- Hyperopia (far-sightedness)
- Astigmatism (blurred vision)
- Strabismus (crossed eyes)

**Possible signs: visual impairment**
Child may...
- Hold objects close to face to see
- Look at objects using peripheral vision
- Squint or cover up one eyes
- Complain that it is hard to see
- Have watery, crusted, or swollen eyes

**Implications for learning environment: visual impairment**
- Potential lack of exploration of environment
- Uses other sensory modalities (verbal, tactile & auditory)
- Needs detailed verbal descriptions
- Extra time to explore all aspects of objects
- Adaptations: light board, Braille, contrasting colors, clearly defined centers and clutter free classroom
Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Facts/characteristics about deafness and hard of hearing
Degrees of Hearing Loss (in decibels)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Intensity (db)</th>
<th>Degree of hearing loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ticking of a Watch</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Slight (16-25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whisper</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mild (26-40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Speech</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Moderate (56-70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Traffic</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Severe (71-90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alarm Clock</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Profound (91+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn Mower</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain Saw</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackhammer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet Engine</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible signs: hearing loss
Child does not...
- Turn to source of sounds from birth to 3-4 months of age
- Say single words such as “dada” or “mama” by 1 year of age
- Turns head when name is called
- Hears some sounds but not others

Implications for learning environment: deafness/hard of hearing
- Affects Speech and social skills
- Difficulty attending to others when they talk
- Adaptations: visual cues, sign language, lip reading, gestures
- Stand in front of the child & at child’s level when speaking
- Use more visual and tactile modalities for learning