



# Ways to Assist Students with Depression or Related Disorders

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There are many ways that schools and teachers can assist students with depression or other related disorders that may interfere with their studies. Many of these accommodations are simple and require nothing more than human kindness. Other accommodations may require more structure.

## **Have the right attitude.**

Most students with these disorders can and wish to succeed. Resist the temptation to view them as “attention-getters” or “slackers.” Mental illnesses can create learning challenges, and your understanding and patience can make a significant difference in the student’s ability to learn.

## **Reduce classroom stress.**

Healthy competition and encouragement are great incentives to learning, but avoid rigid deadlines, lowering grades for non-academic reasons such as messy work or incorrect headings, etc.

## **Stay flexible.**

Most students with these disorders CAN learn, but they cannot always keep the same schedule as the rest of the class. Allow for extra time for homework, tests, missed days. Do not issue rigid ultimatums. You will put yourself in a box and your student in a panic.

## **Expect disorganization and forgetfulness.**

Make sure you have copies of any material you entrust to a student with these illnesses. They are likely to misplace or lose it. Plan out the week’s homework and give it as a handout at the beginning of the week. Kids with a diagnoses may forget to write down assignments, miscopy, or get confused with verbal directions.

## **Give the benefit of the doubt.**

Rather than scold the student, encourage him/her to try harder and to find accommodations for him/herself. Allow for make-up work, or reduce the workload for students who seem to have mastered material or who are overwhelmed.

## **Find the good. Praise it.**

Kids with these disorders find school doubly hard. They must master the work, *and* they must overcome their disorder. They frequently suffer from low self-esteem. Often they are extremely sensitive and can be much harder on themselves than their teachers or parents are. Give generous and genuine praise for their efforts; downplay their failings, make much of their successes. Try never to demean, ridicule, embarrass, or publicly scold a student with a mental disorder. Assure student that these disorders can be overcome, and the job gets easier with practice.

## **Acquaint yourself with more structured options for accommodations.**

IEP’s can be very helpful for students with persistent and/or treatment resistant disorders. 504’s are designed for stu-