

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY NEWSLETTER

December 2025

ENHANCING LEARNING THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATIONS

Welcome to our December edition of the OT in Schools newsletter! In this issue, we'll focus on environmental adaptations in schools.

Environmental adaptations are crucial in helping children of all abilities thrive within the school environment.

Teachers can make environmental adaptations to their classrooms to create a more supportive, inclusive, and effective learning space for all students. These adaptations can support diverse learning styles, accommodate sensory needs, enhance focus, and promote environmental awareness.

Thank you for your dedication to creating inclusive school environments. By continuing to collaborate on environmental adaptations, we're paving the way for every student to thrive, learn, and grow.

Together, let's make our schools more adaptable, welcoming, and empowering for all students!

What are Environmental Adaptations?

Environmental adaptations in schools refer to modifications made to the physical, social, and sensory environments to enhance students' ability to access learning and participate fully in school activities. These adaptations can range from altering classroom layouts, adjusting materials, or modifying daily routines to better accommodate individual needs.

Types of Environmental Adaptations

Physical- make the classroom physically accessible for students with mobility and/or fine motor challenges.

Social and Behavioral- promote positive interactions and support students in managing behavioral challenges.

Cognitive and Learning- help students process information more effectively and access the curriculum.

Visual- help students with ADHD or other attention-related challenges focus better.

Physical Adaptations

Alternative Seating- Options like standing desks, stability balls, floor seating, supportive chairs, or bean bags can help students find comfortable positions to improve focus and reduce restlessness.

Desk and Chair Adjustments- Modifying seating arrangements can support students who struggle with posture or physical stability. Height-adjustable desks, slant boards, or adapted chairs can help students maintain better body alignment, improve handwriting, and support attention.

Wheelchair Accessibility- Rearranging furniture to create clear pathways, ensuring that doorways and desks are accessible.

Quiet Space- Creating a "Calming Corner" in the classroom where students can take a break can help students self-regulate.

Lighting and Noise Adjustments- Use softer lighting or natural light to create a calming atmosphere, avoiding bright fluorescents. Installing carpet or soft-seating, or providing noise-canceling headphones can minimize auditory distractions.

Visual Adaptations

Reduce Clutter- Limit decorations and visual clutter, as this can be distracting, especially for students with ADHD or sensory processing challenges.

Organized Visual Supports- use bulletin boards and posters thoughtfully to reinforce key concepts but keep visuals organized. Visual schedules, color-coded materials, and labeled storage can also aid organization and clarity.

Soothing Colors- Choose calming colors (like blues and greens) for the walls or large areas, as these are less stimulating and can help students focus.

Social and Behavioral Adaptations

Flexible Seating Arrangements- Grouping desks in pods to encourage collaboration or creating quiet, individual workspaces for students who need solitude.

Visual Schedules- Providing visual cues for routines, transitions, and classroom expectations to help students with executive functioning.

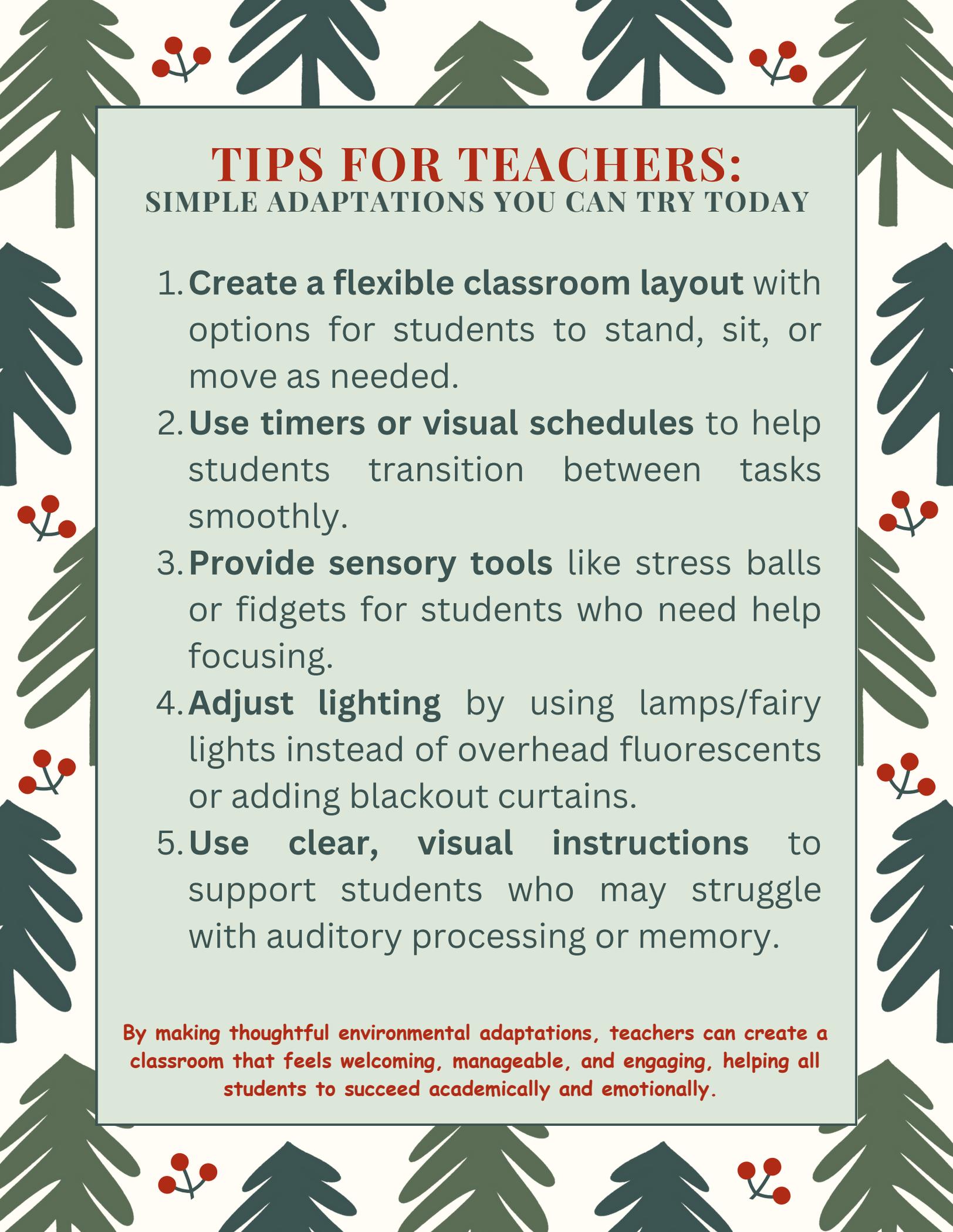
Cognitive and Learning Adaptations

Structured Breaks and Transitions- Integrate structured breaks into the daily schedule. Using a timer or visual cue can give students a sense of predictability and reduce anxiety around transitions.

Extended Time and Modified Assignments- Some students benefit from additional time to complete assignments or tests. Adjusting the timing of certain activities can help students who need more time to process information.

Task Chunking- Breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable steps to reduce cognitive load.

Technology aids- Implementing the use of tablets, audiobooks, or speech-to-text software for students who struggle with reading writing.



TIPS FOR TEACHERS: SIMPLE ADAPTATIONS YOU CAN TRY TODAY

1. **Create a flexible classroom layout** with options for students to stand, sit, or move as needed.
2. **Use timers or visual schedules** to help students transition between tasks smoothly.
3. **Provide sensory tools** like stress balls or fidgets for students who need help focusing.
4. **Adjust lighting** by using lamps/fairy lights instead of overhead fluorescents or adding blackout curtains.
5. **Use clear, visual instructions** to support students who may struggle with auditory processing or memory.

By making thoughtful environmental adaptations, teachers can create a classroom that feels welcoming, manageable, and engaging, helping all students to succeed academically and emotionally.