

MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY'RE AT

Understanding Developmental Levels, Processing
Speed, Skills Deficits, and Behavior

MN DISABILITY CATEGORIES

01 SEVERELY MULTIPLY IMPAIRED

02 AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

03 BLIND-VISUALLY IMPAIRED

04 DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

05 DEAF-BLIND

06 DEVELOPMENTAL COGNITIVE DISABILITIES
MILD/MODERATE

07 DEVELOPMENTAL COGNITIVE DISABILITIES
SEVERE/PROFOUND

08 DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED

09 EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

10 OTHER HEALTH DISABILITIES

11 PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED

12 SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

13 SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

14 TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

STUDENT RIGHTS UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

Students have a right to a Free Appropriate
Public Education (FAPE) in their Least
Restrictive Environment (LRE)

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT NEEDS

Students develop at different rates cognitively and emotionally. Variability in processing speed affects learning pace. Skills deficits may require targeted support, and behavior often reflects underlying needs or challenges.



PROCESSING SPEED & SKILLS DEFICITS

Processing Speed: Some students need more time to absorb information and formulate responses. Rushing them can increase anxiety and errors.

Skills Deficits: Gaps in foundational skills — like reading, math, or social skills — create learning barriers that require targeted support, not punishment.

Key Stat: Up to 15% of students experience significant processing speed challenges that directly impact their academic performance and daily functioning.

Patience Matters: Allow extra wait time after giving instructions. Silence is not defiance — it may be processing in progress!

Scaffolding Builds Mastery: Break tasks into smaller steps. Provide visual supports, prompts, and guided practice to help students succeed incrementally.

Remember: Slow processing or skill gaps do not mean low intelligence. Every student can grow with the right support, time, and encouragement!

BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION

Behavior often signals frustration, confusion, or unmet needs — not defiance.

Understanding triggers helps paras tailor supportive, calm responses. Punishment can worsen behavior; teaching replacement skills builds lasting change.

"Behavior is communication — listen before you respond."

TEACHING SKILLS VS. PUNISHING BEHAVIOR

TEACHING SKILLS: APPROACH

Focus on skill-building and meaningful support. Use positive reinforcement and set clear, consistent expectations to guide growth.

PUNISHING BEHAVIOR: APPROACH

Focuses on compliance and control. May cause anxiety, withdrawal, or escalation — and often ignores the root causes of behavior.

TEACHING SKILLS: OUTCOME

Adapts strategies to each student's developmental level, building lasting confidence, independence, and self-regulation over time.

PUNISHING BEHAVIOR: OUTCOME

Suppresses behavior temporarily but does not teach new skills. Students miss the chance to learn how to manage challenges effectively.

SCENARIOS

INAPPROPRIATE TOUCH

PUSHING

NON-COMPLIANCE

ADD ANOTHER

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES & NEXT STEPS

01

OBSERVE & ASSESS READINESS

02

CLEAR, CALM INSTRUCTIONS

03

GIVE EXTRA PROCESSING TIME

04

REINFORCE POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

05

TEACH REPLACEMENT SKILLS

06

COLLABORATE WITH TEACHERS



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
DEDICATION TO SUPPORTING
EVERY STUDENT!**