

# Grace + Zen: Working with Special Needs Students

Teachers should never ask a parent or child if they have special needs. Parents are asked to inform teachers upon registration, but will not always do so. This is a very sensitive subject, especially with young children who may not be diagnosed yet. Many parents can also be in denial, which is why you never want to ask a parent if their child has special needs.

## Common Special Needs and How to Manage:

- ADD:
  - Get distracted easily and forget things often
  - Switch too quickly from one activity to the next
  - Have trouble with directions
  - Have trouble finishing tasks
  - Fidget and squirm a lot
  - Talk nonstop and interrupt people
  - Run around a lot
  - Touch and play with everything they see
  - Be very impatient
  - Blurt out inappropriate comments
  - Have trouble controlling their emotions.
  - Treatment: ADD is usually treated with medication and/or therapy. Teaching ADD children how to control themselves is very important. Teaching children with ADD can be very frustration, try to remember that their brains work a little differently and have utmost patience and structure with them.
- Sensory Processing Disorder: a condition in which the brain has trouble receiving and responding to information that comes in through the senses. Formerly referred to as **sensory integration** dysfunction, it is not currently recognized as a distinct medical diagnosis.

**Sensory overload** occurs when one or more of the body's senses experiences over-stimulation from the environment. There are many environmental elements that impact an individual. Examples of these elements are urbanization, crowding, noise, mass media, technology, and the explosive growth of information.

**Sensory issues** are usually defined as either hypersensitivity (over-responsiveness) or hyposensitivity (under-responsiveness) to **sensory** stimuli.

Many children have symptoms like these from time to time. But therapists consider a diagnosis of sensory processing disorder when the symptoms become severe enough to affect normal functioning and disrupt everyday life.

Treatment depends on a child's individual needs. But in general, it involves helping children do better at activities they're normally not good at and helping them get used to things they can't tolerate.

Treatment for sensory processing problems is called sensory integration. The goal of sensory integration is to challenge a child in a fun, playful way so he or she can learn to respond appropriately and function more normally.

- Autism: A mental condition, present from early childhood, characterized by difficulty in communicating and forming relationships with other people and in using language and abstract concepts.
- Stubbornness: Make sure the child knows you are in charge. Give them clear boundaries. If they cannot participate in class then they need to sit out and quietly watch until they are invited back in to participate positively. We want to have children in class who want to be there, not who are causing problems and acting like they don't want to be in class.
- Attention Seeking: Praise positive behavior, ignore negative behavior. If the negative behavior continues or is disruptive or harmful, give the child three warnings, and then the choice to sit and observe class quietly or sit in sleeping mouse pose on their mat until they are invited back into class to participate positively.
- Separation Anxiety: Many young children will cry when separated from their parent, even if their parent is still in the room but just not participating in class with them. Although it is tough, the child will usually only cry for a few minutes and then stop crying once they realize they need to be on their own and that their parent is not going to give in. You can nicely suggest this to the parent, but it is ultimately up to the parent if they decide to allow the child to sit out with them or sit on the mat with their child for a few minutes.