



Strategies for working with learners who have been identified as having Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

There are a variety of teaching strategies that are successful in working with learners who have emotional or behavioral disorders. These include (M. Wircenski, 2004):

- Be consistent in standards and expectations regarding the individual's participation in a class. This is the key to dealing with this type of learner. The instructor should firmly establish any rules, regulations, or program standards, as well as the consequences if they are not met. The instructor must be firm and consistent by following through with established consequences as they become necessary.
- Offer positive reinforcement for excellent work, class contributions and progress made.
- Provide a structured program with tasks and activities that do not require a great deal of decision making. Routine gives learners a feeling a security, which reduces impulsive behavior.
- Provide examples and tasks that are as concrete and as meaningful as possible. Abstract concepts can frustrate learners. Demonstrate the procedures for completing assigned tasks so that learners know exactly what to do.
- Do not overload or over-stimulate these learners. This can cause a loss of concentration. Always build on previously mastered tasks. Maintain a success-oriented environment as much as possible.
- Use programmed learning methods and individualized instruction. This allows learners to work successfully at their own pace without feeling threatened or pressured. Computer-assisted instruction and appropriate software can be extremely effective.
- Make certain that directions are very clear. When giving directions to the class, stand near these students to help them be attentive. After giving instructions to the class, check the comprehension of instructions by having the student paraphrase the instructions back to you. Visual cues (directions provided in a task listing format) can be provided.
- Remember that different people have different standards for what constitutes inappropriate behavior. For example, some instructors are less tolerant of verbal activity in the classroom than others. You must take into consideration (a) your expectations for learners in your class, (b) your classroom rules and regulations, (c) the amount of inappropriate behavior you are willing to allow, and (d) your reaction to inappropriate behavior.
- Always get expert advice regarding effects of medication on learners prior to letting them work in a laboratory.
- Establish short-term goals for learners within the existing curriculum/sequence of tasks for the program.
- Provide a highly structured program for learners. Post and review schedules, procedures, rules, regulations and consequences for breaking the rules. Reinforce all of this information on a consistent basis.
- Establish a close and positive rapport with students. This will enable a bond of trust to be established.
- Do not take the actions or words of learners with behavior problems personally. Don't carry problems over from one day to another. This will only enhance a negative situation and make it worse for both the instructor and the learner.