

Factors Affecting Curriculum for Children with Special Needs

Part I

Introduction

Children and adults are exposed to a variety of stressors on any given day. For children, these stressors may manifest themselves in school related symptoms which result in dysfunction. All problems create tension. This tension must be relieved either verbally or behaviorally. If a child is unable to communicate his feelings, as is the case for most children, then that tension will exhibit itself in symptomatic behavior. This symptomatic behavior is what teachers see every day in the classroom. While symptoms may not always indicate a serious problem, the frequency, intensity, and duration of the symptoms usually do.

Teachers are confronted with symptomatic behavior every day. If they do not understand the nature of the symptoms, they will treat them as problems. Treating a fever as a problem will never cure the infection. While it is true that teachers need not “cure” the problem, it is important that they recognize symptom patterns of a more serious condition so that the proper referrals can be made.

If a teacher understands the nature of symptomatic behavior and makes the proper referral for guidance, then a more serious problem can be averted. However, even if correctly identified, a child's symptomatic behavior may take a while to dissipate. It is during this time that teachers can use certain techniques which may calm the child, provide suitable boundaries, reduce classroom frustration, and so on, while the real problem is being resolved. You will be provided with an understanding of what factors may create the observed symptoms, guidance for further referral if necessary, and classroom techniques which can assist you in helping the child reduce the impact of the symptoms.

However, before this, we will discuss nine factors which can contribute stress in a child's life. Any of these factors, if intense enough, can create classroom symptoms resulting in academic, behavioral or social dysfunction. This handout provides parents with insight into the many factors that may affect their child's performance in school.

ACADEMIC FACTORS

There will always be times when academic deficits will impair a child's ability to function in the classroom. Factors that can contribute to academic dysfunction include but are not limited to:

- developmental reading disorders
- developmental math disorders
- developmental writing disorders
- developmental spelling disorders
- poor prior teaching
- lack of basic skills
- inconsistency during critical periods of skill development
- problems in concept formation
- lack of reinforcement

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Environmental factors are defined as those factors which the child may be exposed to at home or in the community which may have a profound impact on the child's ability to function in school. These factors may include home issues such as:

- parental abuse
- parenting fighting
- separation
- divorce
- family illness
- economic hardships
- loss of parent's job
- moving into a new neighborhood
- serious sibling rivalry
- family mental illness
- relatives residing in the home
- alcoholism
- drug abuse

Environmental factors may also originate from community issues such as:

- problems with neighbors
- poor reputation in the neighborhood
- isolation of the family from neighbors

- problems with the law

INTELLECTUAL FACTORS

There may be times when a child's difficulties in school may be the result of intellectual factors. When these factors are present, a child's stress may be manifested in a variety of symptoms. The factors which fall under this category include:

- Undetected limited intellectual ability
- Undetected gifted intellectual capacity