

Universal Design and Use of Adaptations



Universal Design

Universal design is a concept related to making buildings and surrounding environments accessible for all people that came from the field of architecture. Assessment developers use universal design principles to ensure that every child has the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, or behaviors being assessed. For example, an item designed to measure a math skill may be written in a way that allows the use of gestures or an alternate communication system rather than requiring a verbal response. Levels A–D of the Learning Progressions have been developed following universal design so that most children will be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills related to each progression.

However, even an assessment that has incorporated universal design may not be able to appropriately assess all children without

the use of individual adaptations. The logic underlying the provision of adaptations is that without them, a child's disability may be assessed rather than the child's knowledge and skills. Adaptations are provided to eliminate further barriers not addressed by universal design and thus to improve the quality of measurement. For Levels A–D, in addition to universal design, suggested adaptations have been included for use by teachers. These adaptations allow for changes in the environment or differences in observed behavior so that children with disabilities are able to demonstrate knowledge and skills in relation to the SKBs being assessed. The adaptations have been designed to ensure that children with disabilities are assessed in ways that measure ability, rather than disability, and, at the same time, do not change what is being assessed.

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Planning for the Use of Adaptations

Determining Areas of Functioning in Which Adaptations May Be Needed In planning for assessment, it is helpful to first identify areas of need documented by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.

This allows the teacher to focus on planning for and differentiating instruction based on individual student needs. Areas of need to consider include:

- Communication
- Hearing (includes hard of hearing and deaf)
- Motor (includes small motor and large motor)
- Sensory Sensitivity
- Social/Interactional Functioning
- Vision (includes low vision and blind)

Identifying Adaptations The best way to identify appropriate adaptations for the ISPROUT Early Learning Assessment is to identify adaptations that are used every day to

allow a child to access or participate in regular classroom activities. Then, the teacher should review the child's IEP to see if adaptations have been identified for the child by the IEP team. Adaptations should be in place for children routinely in their typical environments and should not be used only during observation for assessment purposes.

Examples of adaptations for each of these areas of functioning can be found on page 3 and 4. The table does not include all possible adaptations that might be appropriate for all children. The teacher will need to consider information about each child to identify appropriate adaptations. Prompting, modeling, or physically guiding a child to produce a behavior are not adaptations and should not be used to promote a desired behavior from a child during observation for assessment.



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Table of Adaptations

Area of Functioning	Examples of Adaptations	
Communication	Communication system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Simplify the language used by adults; use shorter phrases with familiar words. ■ Become familiar with the child's typical mode(s) of response, which may be subtle movements, eye gaze, gestures, or unique sounds. ■ Use words the child understands. ■ Use any signs the child understands or uses. ■ Use an augmentative or alternative communication system the child understands or uses.
	Sensory support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use visual or tactile cues to support the child's communication.
Hearing	Communication system—Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Add use of gestures or signs in communication.
	Sensory support—Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make sure hearing aids or the auditory amplification system in the classroom are on and working. ■ Get close to the child and face the child when speaking.
	Sensory support—Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use the child's system of communication: American Sign Language, Signing Exact English, Cued Speech, etc.
	Sensory support—Hard of Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Get the child's attention visually and make sure the child is looking at objects in the environment that are being referenced.
Motor	Positioning—Large Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Place the child in a supported position that will provide the stability needed to have the most optimal control of movements. ■ Consider the child's range of motion and ability to reach, move, or turn toward the person or object. ■ If mobility is severely limited, place materials within the child's visual field and reach.
	Adaptive equipment—Large Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may need adaptive equipment for movement, such as a walker or wheelchair. ■ Provide materials that will help the child's posture and stability such as wedges, bolsters, seating systems, and other postural supports.
	Alternate response mode—Large Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may use different body parts to accomplish a task.
	Time—Large Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may move more slowly than peers; provide for additional time during activities and routines if needed.
	Positioning—Small Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Place the child in a supported position that will provide stability needed for the most optimal control of movements.
	Adaptive materials—Small Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide materials that will help the child grasp and manipulate the object, such as an adapted spoon and cup or writing tools such as a thick crayon or pencil.
	Alternate response mode—Small Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may use different body parts to accomplish a task.
	Time—Small Motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may move more slowly than peers; provide for additional time during activities and routines if needed.

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Area of Functioning	Examples of Adaptations	
Sensory Sensitivity	Adjust sensory input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase, decrease, or provide different tactile, visual, or auditory input. ■ Allow the child to engage in activities that have been identified to promote sensory regulation, such as swinging for a few minutes before group time or holding a vibrating object during group time.
	Preferred materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use materials that are preferred by the child and that foster interest and engagement. ■ Avoid materials or objects that may be aversive to the child because of a characteristic such as touch, light, or sound.
Social/ Interactional Functioning	Communication system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use any alternative or augmentative communication system or functional communication behaviors the child responds to or initiates.
	Preferred materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use materials that are preferred by the child even if not typical for the activity.
	Preferred adult or peer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arrange for proximity/interactions with preferred peer. ■ Arrange for proximity of preferred adult to encourage interactions with others.
Vision	Visual Materials— Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use objects that are large enough for the child to see, high contrast colors, and either extra or reduced lighting depending on the child. ■ Use adaptive materials such as a light box, magnifiers, and other low vision aids as appropriate. ■ Place materials in relation to the child such that they are within the child's visual field and at optimal viewing distance.
	Sensory Support— Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide tactile or physical input when explaining what the child is being asked to do. ■ Provide verbal explanations about what the child is being asked to do. ■ Make sure glasses are clean and any visual aids are available.
	Orientation and Mobility— Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow the child to use any beginning orientation and mobility techniques, including scanning, trailing, cane use, and protective techniques, at the level he or she is proficient.
	Alternative Response Mode— Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may turn head or use head movements to utilize a limited visual field.
	Time— Low Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may move more slowly than peers; provide for additional time during activities and routines if needed.
	Sensory Support— Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide tactile input by letting the child tactilely explore and identify an object prior to being asked to perform an action with it. ■ Guide the child physically through an action in order to communicate what is desired, and then observe whether the child can do it without guidance. ■ Provide verbal explanations and/or tactile input about what the child is being asked to do.
	Environmental Support— Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide boundaries around the space the child is attending to; for example, put materials on a tray. ■ Keep the larger environment organized and consistent.
	Orientation and Mobility— Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow the child to use any beginning orientation and mobility techniques, including scanning, trailing, cane use, and protective techniques, at the level he or she is proficient.
	Materials— Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When appropriate, use real objects rather than toy representations. ■ The child may need to use Braille materials and tools. ■ Use materials with tactile or auditory interest.
	Time— Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The child may move more slowly than peers; provide for extra time during activities and routines if needed.