



# Strategies for Addressing Student Stressors in the Classroom

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## Appropriate accommodations

A student's IEP will include instructional accommodations, environmental accommodations, and assessment accommodations. Include the student in selecting the accommodations, and ensure that they are in place in your classroom. When students are consistently provided with appropriate accommodations, they are better able to access the curriculum and demonstrate their learning, which may in turn reduce their stress levels in the classroom.



## Scaffolding

When students are learning new or difficult tasks, scaffolding provides the right level of support for the students' current ability. The task itself should not change, but the amount of support provided will be reduced over time, as the student becomes more skilled and able to do the task independently. Appropriate scaffolding should reassure students that they are supported, and therefore reduce stress related to academic performance.



## Predictable schedules and routines

Changes of any sort can be very stressful for students with LDs. Predictable schedules and routines, as well as clear expectations, can help students anticipate how the day will go, which may decrease opportunities for emotions to build up. Some strategies to consider:

- Have a daily or weekly schedule on the board.
- Provide clear and easy-to-follow directions and instructions. Break down directions and instructions into smaller chunks, and explain one step at a time.
- Provide clear warnings when transitioning activities or subjects.  
For example, "You have five minutes before we move on to the next activity."  
"We are now moving on to [name the next activity]."
- Provide advanced warnings for any significant changes in routines, and coach students to cope with change. For example, send a note home about changes in the classroom or a substitute teacher, so that caregivers can support the student in preparing for significant changes.



## Manage the environment

Consider seating arrangements in the classroom. For example, you may intentionally seat a student near the front of the classroom to help them focus their attention.

Consider assigning groups (e.g., based on shared interests or varying skill level) instead of letting students choose their own groups. Students tend to gravitate towards the peers they know and are familiar with, often leaving out students who may not have very many close friends.

Plan ahead for assemblies and large group activities. If you have a student who is easily overwhelmed by large groups you can plan in advance for assemblies by having the student sit on the end of a row, or by having the student arrive and leave either a bit earlier or later.



## Break space

Provide a space inside or outside the classroom for students to go to when they are feeling overwhelmed or stressed. This may be a quiet area of the classroom or another room, or students might go for a quick walk in the hall, get a drink of water, or run something to the office for the teacher.

Have a “cool down pass”, such as a colour-coded card, or an agreed upon signal, which allows the student to show that they need to take a break. This allows the student to ask for support without being placed in the spotlight in front of their peers.



## Mindfulness and relaxation

Help students respond to their own stress levels by teaching mindfulness and relaxation strategies. Examples include mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, guided visual imagery, and movement breaks.

Practice these skills throughout the day. For example, at the beginning of class, before presentations or tests, before recess or lunch, and/or at the end of the day.

Have visual cues in the classroom on different calming strategies as a reminder to students to practice on their own.



## Praise

Offer genuine praise when a student is able to use a specific skill that they have been working on. This will bring attention to helpful coping strategies and how they successfully handled a certain task or situation. Remember to recognize, praise, and reinforce students' *efforts*, not just results. For example, “I saw you using your breathing strategy when you got frustrated today. You must be proud of yourself for using this strategy to stay calm.”