

As a teacher with special education experience, my goal is for students to feel confident, comfortable, and heard in my classroom. The first way I do this is by getting to know my students. I learn what they are interested in, what reward they will work for, what will set them off, and what their boundaries are. I find their level of independence, where their strong areas are, and where they may need extra support. Second, I am always sure to treat my students as individuals. Students are on various levels and learning different skills, but they also learn differently from one another. As an example, in a life skills room, one student may be able to learn to tie his or her shoes using the two-loop method, but another student might be successful using the one-loop method. Third, it is of the utmost importance to have a structured and organized classroom. Students should know what to expect when they walk in the door each day and if there is a change to the normal routine, students should be prepped beforehand.

One way I help the diverse learners in my classroom is by breaking them up into learning groups based on the skill or lesson being taught and the strategy that works best for them. I also individualize instruction for all students, for example, by giving some students shorter readings and fewer problems or giving other students longer readings and more problems. Some students benefit from breaking larger assignments into smaller pieces. It makes them seem less daunting and provides a smaller unit for them to focus on. Most of the activities we do in the classroom are hands-on. I do not believe children learn from completing worksheets. Rather than completing a worksheet on money, students have bills and coins in front of them and practice making change.

I communicate with families weekly about their child, if not more frequently. Families are a great tool I use when it comes to learning about their child. They provide me with insights, tips, and recommendations on how to handle situations with their child. One time when a student refused to do her work, we contacted her mom, and she suggested using the extra snacks she packed as a reward for doing work. Within an hour the student had done all her work. Families are vital to the IEP process as well. They know their child's school history from the beginning, where I have only been there for a short time. They know what has and has not worked for their child in the past. Families can be an enormously powerful voice when fighting for what their children need. Lastly, I believe families can continue their child's learning at home. With a simple letter or call home, I inform families about what they can work on at home to help their child excel even further.

One attribute that I possess that helps me every day in the classroom is patience. Sometimes it takes a while for students to grasp a concept I am teaching. Sometimes students cannot sit still and focus, and they need many reminders to stay on task. When students get overwhelmed and start acting out, I remain calm and patient to help them work through it. Another quality that helps me as a special educator is being adaptable. One event or bad moment can throw the whole day off. I am always prepared to switch up my plans for the day if needed. One final attribute that, while not commonly thought of, is important, is being energetic. I

always have an excited attitude towards anything the class is working on. I am always ready to go and even play during recess.

Two qualities that help me advocate for my students are my insistence and determination. When I know there is something my students need that will benefit them, I will stop at nothing to get it for them. I will fight tooth and nail to get my students what they need, whether it is additional accommodations, or time in the gym to run and get energy out. Next, I ensure my classroom is always organized. This way my students always know where the materials they need are, and I save time by knowing where everything I need is. I keep bins and cabinets labeled and at the end of the day make sure everything is in order before I leave. Two other qualities of mine are being outgoing and friendly, which helps build relationships with other teachers. I plan activities with other teachers and get my students out of our classroom and interacting with other students. This allows them to build friendships with students outside our class and develop social skills.

Above all, I love teaching and I love my students. I make connections with my students so they trust me and feel comfortable in their classroom community. I make my class into a family, a home away from home.