Getting To Know a Student

Use the questions on this page to interview adults who know this student (family members, other after school staff, regular school day teachers and staff). You can also use the answers to guide your initial interactions with the child, but keep in mind that your observations may differ. Any information that helps you better understand **the child's point of view** can help you make choices about providing helpful support and instruction.

What engages this student? What attracts this child's interest or attention? When no one is directing or inviting this child's attention, what does s/he do?

What is this student's temperament? An awareness of temperament helps us understand the range of individual differences among children and adults and provides insight into the internal drive behind a child's behavior. An active child may be able to do homework while hopping from foot to foot. A child who is slow-to-warm may need time to adjust to new situations.

What kinds of relationships does this student establish? Does this student enjoy others or tend to be on her/his own? Is s/he more inclined toward adults or peers?

What are this student's current methods of communicating? Does this child use words to communicate? Does s/he use actions? Does this child use her/his voice with ease? Does s/he communicate in other ways?

How does this student interact with the sensory world? What helps her/him learn? When getting to know a child of any age, allow yourself to be curious about which senses s/he is using at any given moment (hearing, seeing, feeling/touching, tasting, smelling). What cues are likely to stand out for this child? What could you do to help her/him notice relevant details so that s/he is more likely to understand?

Sensory information refers to what we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. For example, a child might be very particular about textures of food or what touches his fingers; another might block her ears to some sounds or cover his eyes to block the light. Some children appear uncomfortable when touched in ordinary ways by others. A **less** inclusive adult expects that all children in a group will respond to the same cues at the same time and in the same way.

How does this student respond to situational problems? When s/he falls down or drops something, what does s/he do? What does this child find frustrating and how does s/he try to cope with the experience of frustration?

Any adult who gives a group of children directions aloud and wants them all to listen, wait, make eye contact, keep their hands to themselves and sit still is guaranteed to come across children who do not and cannot follow through as directed. These children are often dismissed as having poor attention, or misbehaving, of being distractable, naughty or having a disability. A child's actions offer a great deal of usable information about what they need and how they learn. Adults often focus too much on what children are not doing — or not doing to adult satisfaction.

Wondering about a child's perspective can help you make more inclusive decisions. An inclusive attitude holds that children teach us what might help them when we are willing to notice their attention and demeanor.

Adapted from: Sweet, Mark. *A Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care*. Disability Rights Wisconsin, 2008.

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