



Shaping the Hearts of Early Elementary Children with Special Needs

Use these ideas for reaching early elementary children who have special needs.

TIPS FOR TRANSITION TIMES

In a roomful of many teachable hearts, we frequently move quickly from one activity to another without thinking about everything involved in the act of transitioning. But for children who experience developmental delays or who face challenges in adaptive functioning, classroom transitions can be anything but smooth and tranquil. In fact, the many changes can seem quite abrupt and frightening.

Adaptive functioning skills are those skills that assist us in navigating the most basic changes of function within our environment. These include the skills required to move effortlessly, step-by-step, within any single task in order to accomplish the whole task. Persons with developmental delays or disabilities often see each part of the task separately, rather than seeing it as a single whole act.

When this concept is translated to the number of acts involved in participating in a classroom environment, it is understandable why children with special learning needs often become overwhelmed and anxious. One way to lessen the anxiety of children who struggle with changes in classroom activities is to use a picture schedule. A simple visual map of the day's schedule can help children plan out the skills they will need for participating in various activities.

A picture schedule is also useful for showing that a preferred activity will be part of the day's activities. For instance, if working independently at an art center soothes a child, it might help the child tolerate other non-preferred activities if he sees when art time will take place. Pointing to a picture schedule, you can say, "First we have Bible Exploration time, and then we will have an art activity." Children are sometimes willing to endure an activity that is more difficult if the reward they seek is in sight.

Instructions for making a picture schedule board and a set of picture cards to be used with the board are included in the Special Needs Helps folder on the *Resources* CD. The picture cards feature the same icons used in *Early Elementary Teacher*. Using these cards, you can easily show all children which activity is coming next—just choose the cards for activities you will be offering and place them on the picture board in the order that you will offer the activities.