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"PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: KNOWLEDGE OR SOCIAL SKILLS FOR CWSN"

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Introduction

A preschool, also known as nursery school, pre-primary school, or play school, is an educational establishment or learning space offering early childhood education to children before they begin compulsory education at primary school. It may be publicly or privately operated, and may be subsidized from public funds.

Pre-school is the first place where the child builds his/her self-esteem. A child learns the importance of his own name, things and friends. Every child learns to communicate with his teachers and fellow students in the Pre School. It is the right place for the child's foundation for lifelong progress. The skills and knowledge that the child develops in the Pre School have a great impact on the aptitude and attitude of the child later in life.

In preschool, children will learn to strengthen their social and emotional development. Children learn how to compromise, be respectful and problem solve. Preschool provides an environment for children to explore, gain a sense of self, play with peers and build self-confidence. Children learn they can accomplish tasks and make decisions without the help of their parents. Behavior management is a major part of preschool learning. In preschool, children learn how to be students. Children learn patience, how to raise their hands and take turns. Children also learn how to share the teacher's attention.

Children also learn about routine, following directions and waiting. Quality preschools help children find answers through exploration, experimentation, and conversation. Going to preschool also helps children learn to separate from their parent or caregiver.

Researches on Pre School education have shown that children taught at an early age usually have improved social skills, fewer behavioural problems and better grades without special and attention. Self confidence gained by learning in a playful manner adds to the personality development of the child. The child's positive learning attitude, the basic foundation in language, comprehension and management, help the teacher facilitate the child's learning at kindergarten and higher levels of education. Moreover childhood education specialists claim that young children learn best when they have an opportunity to interact with their peers, and their parents and instructors treat them kindly. They bloom well in a tension free environment. Besides they comprehend and learn things better if they are introduced to new things in small portions.

Pre school education is the need of the time as most of the parents are working and do not have quality time to spend with their children. Most of the babies are left at home with grand parents or helpers who are not able to guide them the way they should be. Preschool education helps in a child's emotional, social and personal growth and development. Although a child learns how to talk while at home, in preschool continuous interaction and exposure with children of same age group and teachers helps them to enhance their communication skills. This involves translation of mental images to languages so that thoughts and knowledge be transformed into information.

Understanding about Children with Special Needs like Cognitive Disability, Hearing and Speech Impairment, Speech Impairment, Visual Impairment, Loco motor Impairment, Multiple Impairments, Learning Disability, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders etc.

According to WHO the term disability should be changed to difficulties –difficulty in seeing, listening, communication, moving, learning, In order to understand children with special needs we must know the different adjectives or terms by which they are often described. Impairment, Disability and Handicaps are terms which are frequently used interchangeably. However, there are conceptual differences among the terms. The difference has been clearly outlined in the definition of each of the terms by WHO in the international classification of impairment, disability and Handicaps (ICIDH).

➤ **Cognitive Disability:** Currently Cognitive disability is used to replace the old terms mental retardation , mentally handicapped ., The change in terminology is to remove the effect of labeling or stigma associated with words such as 'handicapped' or 'disabled'. A mentally challenged child's IQ is also less than average. Some of them can be trained in a class for normal children and can be made useful for themselves and the nation. But others are so mentally deficient that they cannot trained for any work. Thus, some mentally deficient children are 'educable' while others with severely deficient are 'trainable' only. Depending on their IQ, Mental Retardation has be classified into:

Classification Of (Mental Retardation) Cognitive Disability

Severity Levels	Range of IQ
Mild Mentally Retarded	50-75
Moderate Mentally Retarded	35-49
Severe Mentally Retarded	20-34
Profound Mentally Retarded	Below 20

➤ **Hearing and Speech Impairment:** Hearing impairment means any degree and type of auditory disorder, while deafness means an extreme inability to discriminate conversational speech through the ear. Children with hearing impaired, then, are those who cannot use their hearing for communication. People with a lesser degree of hearing impairment are called hard of hearing. Usually, a person is considered deaf when sound must reach at least 90 decibels (5 to 10 times louder than normal speech) to be heard, and even amplified speech cannot be understood. Hearing impairment may be sensorineural or conductive. Sensorineural hearing loss involves damage to the auditory pathways within the central nervous system, beginning with the cochlea and auditory nerve, and including the brain stem and cerebral cortex (this prevents or disrupts interpretation of the auditory signal). Conductive hearing loss is damage to the outer or middle ear which interferes with sound waves reaching the cochlea.

➤ **Speech Impairment:** Speech Impairment may range from problems with expression or voice strength to complete voicelessness, chronic hoarseness, stuttering or stammering. Speech difficulties can also be associated with cerebral palsy, hearing impairment and brain injury. Children with speech difficulties may have difficulty to understand and have difficulty in expressing ideas.

➤ **Visual Impairment:** Visual impairment for children with poor vision, to children who can see light but no shapes, to children who have no perception of light at all. However, for general discussion it is useful to think of this population as representing two broad groups: those with low vision and those who are legally blind. A child is termed legally blind when its visual acuity (sharpness of vision) is 20/200 or worse after correction, or when their field of vision is less than 20 degrees; in the best eye after correction. Low vision includes problems (after correction) such as dimness of vision, haziness, film over the eye, foggy vision, extreme near- or farsightedness, distortion of vision, spots before the eyes, color distortions, visual field defects, tunnel vision, no peripheral vision, abnormal sensitivity to light or glare, and night blindness.

➤ **Loco motor Impairment:** Locomotor Impaired children are one of the categories of special needs children and essentially members of society, like others. There is not much difference between these children and normal ones in their psychological make-up. They have their own exceptionalities and influences in society. Previously, they were looked upon with sympathy or pity but with the awakening of social awareness the general attitude towards the differently abled has also under gone change. A locomotor impaired condition is the state of the body which hinder the child from making normal progress in school activities as average children do. They require special attention and equipment to control or overcome different abilities.

➤ **Multiple Impairments:** It is common to find that whatever caused a single type of impairment also caused others. This is particularly true where disease or trauma is severe, or in the case of impairments caused by aging. Deaf-blindness is one commonly identified combination. Most of these individuals are neither profoundly deaf nor legally blind, but are both visual and hearing impaired to the extent that strategies for deafness or blindness alone won't work. People with developmental disabilities may have a combination of mental and physical impairments that result in substantial functional limitations in three or more areas of major life activity. Diabetes, which can cause blindness, also often causes loss of sensation in the fingers. This makes braille or raised lettering impossible to read. Cerebral palsy is often accompanied by visual impairments, by hearing and language disorders, or by cognitive impairments.

➤ **Learning Disability:** Learning disability is any one of a diverse group of conditions, believed to be of neurological origin, that cause significant difficulties in perceiving and /or processing auditory, visual or spatial information, or any combination of these information forms. Learning Difficulties often occur in children with average or above average intelligence and they involve one or more of the basic processes used in understanding or using spoken or written language. They include disorders that impair functions such as reading(dyslexia) writing (dysgraphia) and mathematical calculation (dyscalculia). They vary widely within each category in the patterns they exhibit. The marked discrepancy between intellectual capacity, and achievement and output (expressing information and responding) is what characterizes a learning difficulty.

➤ **Emotional and Behavioral Disorders:** Emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) is a broad category which is used commonly in educational settings, to group a range of more specific perceived difficulties of children and adolescents A child exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics to a marked degree for a long duration of time that adversely affects their education:

- Difficulty to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- Difficulty to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Does My Child Have Special Needs? is a question that many parents of young children ask, This is soon followed by another key question, what is a special need? A 14 month old child may not yet walk like many of the other children. Does that child have a special need? Another child repeats back everything she hears, including what is on television. Is that a special need? And if a child does have one or more special needs, where can the family go to get services and supports that can help?

A teacher will be the first person to whom worried parents approach. First the teacher has to know who the children with special needs are. Any child requiring attention due to physical problems or suffering physical or emotional distress could be considered as children with special needs. Delayed milestones, activities that cannot be done, Food that cannot be eaten and everyday tasks that we may take for granted, that cannot be achieved without help.

“Special needs” is a term with many definitions, ranging from mild learning disabilities to severe cognitive disability (mental retardation), terminal illnesses, food allergies or developmental delays. When a child needs help, outside of the ordinary, they have different needs that have to be met and different goals to achieve.

Mastering social skills can be challenging for many children who have special needs. This can be the case if their difficulties lie within an intellectual disability, a language disorder, or autism. In fact, a child who has language delays due to one of the three previously mentioned diagnoses may be slow to acquire the ability to name his feelings and needs. He will therefore have trouble making verbal requests and use his behavior and actions to express himself.

This is common in two-year-olds. At two years of age, children’s language skills are not developed enough to make it possible for them to communicate verbally with others. For this reason, aggressive behavior culminates. In children who have special needs, aggressive behavior can persist and inevitably harm children’s relationships with others. Other children can complain about the behavior of children who have developmental delays and refuse to play with them.

Developmental delays and various diagnoses that are common during early childhood can also affect children’s emotional maturity. Waiting for their turn, sharing, following instructions, sharing instructions, reaching a compromise, and expressing empathy are examples of social skills that children may find especially difficult to manage.

Children who have special needs develop social skills

As adults, understanding how behaviors which may seem less prosocial are the norm for children who have special needs will make it easier for us to feel empathy. We will therefore be less likely to be irritated by these behaviors.

That is precisely what children who have special needs require: empathy, consideration, and understanding. In contrast, a judgmental attitude, exasperation, or impatience may exacerbate their behavioral problems since they will feel as if no matter what they do (and ultimately who they are) it’s never enough or worthy of praise and appreciation. Children may become discouraged and lack the will to sustain their efforts. As a result, their problematic behaviors may worsen and negatively affect your relationship as well as group dynamics.

How to foster social skills with children who have special needs

Visual aids

For example, you may use simple illustrated scenes that represent daily life to break down the steps associated with appropriate behaviors. To help children learn to communicate with others, you could use the following illustrations:

- A child looking at another child.
- A child smiling at another child.
- A child moving towards another child.
- A child asking another child if he can play next to him.
- Two children playing side by side and smiling.

Concrete examples of what is expected of the children in your group

You could, for example, execute whatever it is you expect a child to do moments before asking him to do so. Encourage the child to reproduce your behavior, actions, or words, and congratulate him for his efforts or for succeeding.

Prosocial modeling

Whenever a child who has special needs witnesses another child demonstrating prosocial behavior, be sure to congratulate him, for example by saying, “Good job Gregory for offering to help Alicia.” In doing so, the child who has special needs will observe what is considered acceptable behavior and with time, he may learn to reproduce it.

Positive reinforcement

Every time you notice a child who has special needs adopting prosocial behavior, congratulate him and show him how proud you are. Everyone enjoys compliments. Positive reinforcement may motivate the child to continue to adopt this type of behavior.

Thus, keep in mind that delays are normal when it comes down to children who have special needs acquiring social skills. It is therefore highly likely that these children will not be at the same level as the children in your group who have no diagnosis. Simply adapt your expectations to the capacities and limits of those who have special needs. Recognize their progress and remember to be proud of your efforts too!

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