

Supporting Social-Emotional Needs of 2e Students

It is important for parents and school staff to develop 2e students' strengths while supporting areas of need. Coping with stress of unaddressed needs can influence a student's social-emotional well-being and may manifest in challenging behaviors, anxiety, and/or underperformance in school. Understanding and supporting 2e students' social-emotional needs is essential to the student's well-being.

Focus on Strengths

Twice-exceptional students have unique talents, interests, and areas of expertise. Recognizing and utilizing these strengths will motivate academic performance and support development of weaker skills.

Approaches:

- Get to know and nurture the students' areas of strength.
- Provide classroom activities, assignments, and opportunities to collaborate that align to the student's needs or interests.
- Connect students with mentors, internships, and/or volunteer opportunities in areas of interest.
- Invite guest speakers to share about careers related to the content or area of study.

Establish Rapport and Build Trust

Students who feel understood, respected, and appreciated for their strengths as well as their challenges will be better able and willing to learn.

Approaches:

- Make the classroom a respectful and safe learning space that promotes inclusion.
- Develop a class culture that is responsive to student feedback. Ask all students to share concerns so 2e students can see they are not the only ones who may be challenged in the school setting.
- Remain calm and supportive. Having a trusted adult helps a student to feel valued and more willing to accept help working through problems.
- Promote self-advocacy and provide opportunities to practice through role playing and modeling.

Teach and Model Flexible Thinking

Some 2e students may be particularly inflexible in their thinking.

Approaches:

- Try not to attach precise times to activities unless necessary. Use time ranges instead.
- Talk with the student about the fact that changes can always come up despite plans and schedules, e.g., teacher absence, cancellation of planned after school activity, fire alarms.
- Anticipate times when a student might become inflexible and, before the situation arises, collaborate with the student to develop a proactive plan, e.g., non-verbal signals between adult and student, list of acceptable alternatives, practice appropriate language to express feelings
- Model flexible thinking such as saying, for example, "plan A is not working. let's make another plan":

Address Anxiety

Some 2e students have a level of anxiety that interferes with their school success. The sources of anxiety are highly individual to each student and may present as inattentiveness, disruptive or defiant behavior, or underachievement; however, the behaviors may be a result of a disability, identified or unidentified. Unaddressed anxiety may result in physical complaints, poor attendance, or school refusal.

Approaches:

- Plan for predictable stressors, such as exams or transitions between schools.
- Allow the student to walk through a school, meet teachers and case managers, ask questions, and discuss concerns in advance of beginning a new school.
- Listen to and validate the student's concerns.
- Teach self-awareness and coping skills (e.g., deep or slow breathing, counting, or other relaxation strategies).

Foster a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset is the belief that intelligence is not fixed or something one is born with, rather something that can be developed (Dweck, 2018). Students who are fearful of making mistakes may be at risk for stress, anxiety, and underachievement.

Approaches:

- Create a learning environment that encourages risk-taking, creativity, and innovation, for example, find role models in history or in media to help students see that success comes in many forms and follows many paths.
- Allow students to take calculated risks and reframe "failures" as "setbacks" that are part of the learning process for everyone.
- Reinforce the idea that success comes from hard work and gradual improvement rather than innate intelligence or talent.
- Share stories of times you took healthy risks or when something was difficult and how you persisted.

RESOURCES

Baum, S. M., Schader, R. M., & Owen, S. V. (2017). *To be gifted & learning disabled: Strength-based strategies for helping twice-exceptional students with LD, ADHD, ASD, and more*. Texas: Prufrock.

Baska, A., & VanTassel-Baska, J. (2018). *Interventions that work with special populations in gifted education*. Waco TX: Prufrock Press.

Dawson, P., & Guare, R. (2018). *Executive skills in children and adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and intervention*. New York: Guilford Press.

Kaufman, S. B. (2018). *Twice exceptional: Supporting and educating bright and creative students with learning difficulties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.