**Learning Differences**

People who have learning disabilities often do not have any physical appearance characteristics that would identify them as having a disability. That is why learning disabilities are often referred to as hidden disabilities. Someone who is cognitively impaired has learning differences that are affected even more severely. People with learning differences may have problems understanding the spoken or written word. This may be due to difficulty in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling or doing math. These people may have average cognitive abilities, as well as no visual or hearing impairments. There are many different kinds of intelligences. It is important to examine how each student learns most affectively and then use those strengths whenever possible. Students with learning differences may require extra assistance in learning ways to understand many things such as written words, how to write or draw, math concepts and social issues.

**Types of Learning Disabilities**

* Dyslexia: Difficulties in being able to read because the letters in a word are possibly in the wrong order, reversed, incomplete or somehow keep moving.
* Dysgraphia: Writing difficulties due to either problems with muscle coordination, or not understanding the letters and words.
* Dyscalculia: Difficulties in doing math problems due to not recognizing numbers, not remembering math facts, or not being able to understand the problem.
* Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD): Difficulties in paying attention, concentrating, and organizing tasks. Some people are very active and impulsive.

**Types of Developmental Disabilities**

When the differences that exist in someone’s brain are great enough to keep that person from learning and growing typically, we say the person has a developmental disability. Symptoms usually appear during the first three years of childhood and continue throughout life. Examples include mental retardation, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Downs Syndrome.

People who have a severe developmental disability usually only learn very basic skills, such as learning to communicate and simple self-care skills. People who have a moderate (or less severe) developmental disability can learn and do more things. They learn skills that will help them get jobs so that they can live as independently as possible. People with moderate developmental disabilities will probably require some assistance from others. People who have a mild developmental disability learn much more, but they have trouble with harder tasks. They can grow up to get jobs and live on their own.

Autism is a neurologically based developmental disorder that lasts throughout a person's life. People who are affected by autism have abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication. They have a limited repertoire of activities and interests. They often have problems integrating their senses. Autism is a spectrum disorder in that some people are highly intelligent while others are severally cognitively impaired. Some people are mildly affected in communication and have a generally average sensory system while others are completely non-verbal and tolerate very little sensory stimulus. Autism affects boys four times more often than girls. In 2007, the National Center for Disease Control estimated as many as 1 out of every 166 children born today are affected by an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The cause of autism is still unknown.

**Activities for the Learning Differences Stations**

The main emphasis of the following two stations is that our brains collect information in different orders and we learn in different ways. People with learning differences can learn, but they may need extra help, more time or different strategies to do so. Please mention and possibly role-play throughout these activities that teasing and bullying is inappropriate.

**Activities for the Learning Differences Stations (cont.)**

**Station #2 Learning Differences II**

1. Say the color the word appears in out loud. This demonstrates how it may feel to have difficulty concentrating or a short attention span. How long did it take the student to feel like quitting? Did the student give up?
2. Read sentences and stories representing dyslexia. The stories should always be puzzle side up when the new group of students approaches the table. Even a short glimpse at the answers will take away some of the empathy building we are trying to accomplish. Someone with a learning disability can never turn the paper over to see the answers. Avoid letting the students continuously turn the paper over to see if they figured out a sentence correctly or decoded a word correctly.
3. Try to figure out the math problems. There is an answer key in the kit. Please hide the answer key at all times. Do not allow the student to rewrite the problems correctly. Someone with this disability can never see the problem correctly. This represents dyscalculia.
4. Each student should set up one schedule activity. Take the color-coded pieces out of the Ziploc bag and place them on the Velcro in an order that makes sense. The person who uses these types of schedules then removes each item as it is finished. The person places the completed task back into the Ziploc bag. These schedules are helpful to people who need to see information in order to understand it the best.
5. Read one of the Social Story examples to the students. It explains how a common event happens. Some people have a difficult time understanding social situations. Reading a social story just before the event reminds them of what to expect and how to behave.

**Optional**

There is a display board for this impairment station that offers more information. Encourage the students to look at the board if time allows.