



Luria Academy Inclusion Guide

A Guide to Welcoming Students with Disabilities into Day School Communities

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Special Education Law

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) of 1975, the foremost federal law in Special Education defines, a "child with a disability" as a "child...with an intellectual disability, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance..., orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; AND, who... [because of the condition] needs special education and related services [in order to succeed in school]."

[Here](#) is more information on IDEA and the legal parameters of Special Education. And [here](#) is more information on the classifications of special education.

Students with disabilities tend to learn differently than the neurotypical learner. They often cannot sit as long, or process information as quickly or accurately as their normative peers. They also tend to have different strengths and weaknesses than a typical child, which should be taken into consideration by educators. Therefore, it is important that there are accommodations and differentiation for these different types of learners. There is much information on Howard Gardner's [Theory of Multiple Intelligences](#), which theorizes that there are seven different types of intelligences that a person can have that allow them to process the world around them. This is problematic for an "educational system that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning" (Gardner). Therefore, the best way to accommodate students with disabilities in the classroom is to instruct with a methodology that promotes interest-based learning, engages the students through multi-sensory experiences (to allow for a range of intelligences and learning preferences) and involves student participation. There are many types of progressive educational methodologies that meet these qualifications. One such pedagogical theory is Montessori.

Special Education Services

In New York City, students in private schools have the right to receive special education services through the Department of Education. Luria Academy does not employ special education service providers, rather, we advocate for our students to receive services from the city and integrate the most qualified, experienced professionals referred by local agencies. In order to do this, the CSE, Committee on Special Education (for students ages 5-21) CPSE, Committee on Preschool Special Education (for students ages 3-5), or Department of Health, who oversees the Early Intervention program (for students ages 0-3) must evaluate the student and determine if the student has a disability and if the student's education is impacted by his or her disability.

In order to do that, there is a protocol of five steps:

1. Referral - The parents and teachers of the student request that the child be evaluated
2. Evaluation - A school psychologist will evaluate the student with a norm-referenced (to compare the student to his/her peers) assessment
3. Individualized Education Plan Meeting - At this meeting, the Team, consisting of the parents, school psychologist, general education teacher, special education teacher and social worker review the results of the assessment and how the child is performing in school academically, socially, emotionally and physically.
4. Determination - The Team determines if the student has a disability and if so, what classification the student falls under and what special education services the student would need in order to succeed in school. Those services include educational goals, the frequency and length of time per week that a specific therapy is provided, and learning or assessment modifications.
5. Review - Every year, the Team reconvenes for an annual review to ensure that the student's needs are still being met. Once every three years there is a triennial review to determine if the child is still eligible for special education services. Our special education department at Luria Academy will remind the parents about important dates and documents related to special education services.

[Here](#) is more information on Special Education protocol in New York City.

Some common types of services the Team can recommend for a student with a disability include:

Occupational Therapy - OT mainly helps students with fine motor skills, such as writing, sensory integration, and organization

Physical Therapy - PT mainly helps students with gross motor skills, such as running and jumping, motor planning, and building core strength

Speech and Language Therapy - ST mainly helps students with pragmatic language (how to initiate or carry on a conversation), articulation, following directions, processing language, expressing language and sentence construction

Counseling or Play Therapy - Counseling mainly helps students understand cause and effect, learn conflict resolution skills, frustration tolerance and manage feelings

SETSS (Special Education Teacher Support Services) - SETSS is academic support for a school aged (Kindergarten and older) student who struggles with a specific academic skill such as decoding (reading) or math computation

SEIT (Special Education Itinerant Teacher) - SEIT is general support for a preschool student (aged 3-5) who struggles with pre-academic skills, and/or social/emotional skills needed for Kindergarten and beyond

Paraprofessional (Crises or Health) - A paraprofessional is a 1:1 shadow assigned to a school-aged student who requires more constant supervision than a typical student. A crises “para” is assigned to a student who is at risk to him or her-self or others. This includes students who will run away from adults when upset or frustrated. A health para is assigned to a student who requires healthcare. This includes students with catheters and feeding tubes as well as students not fully toilet trained over age five.

Note: There are other special education services, such Orientation and Mobility, that a student can require, but the above list is the most common services for Luria students.

Classroom Culture

Every classroom in every school has a unique culture. There are certain expectations of the students set by the teacher, and equally, there are expectations set by students for adults, both those teaching and supporting learning as well as incoming guests.

These guests should do their best to honor the classroom culture, be it removing one's shoes, using a certain volume or tone of voice, or navigating the classroom in a specific way. Guests to a classroom can ask what the protocol is, or model by example. For instance, if all the students are working silently, a guest should not come in speaking in full volume. Likewise, if a lesson is taking place on the floor, it is preferred for observing guests to join on the floor as opposed to pulling up a chair.

Schools can help visitors and incoming support staff honor classroom culture by providing an observation guide or welcome sheet in advance of their visit which outlines the expectations. This can be implemented school-wide or vary from classroom to classroom based on the school's unique needs.

Community Accommodations

Synagogues can be fraught with challenges for families with children with disabilities. The need for silence immediately followed by communal prayer can be difficult for many children with sensitivities to noise, or who find it difficult to remain silent when needed. Children's services do exist in many synagogues, but may not go far enough to be inclusive of children with disabilities.

The Jewish community has made, and continues to make, great progress in recognizing the need for inclusiveness in worship and education settings. Synagogues are [developing innovative programs](#) for inclusion of those with disabilities. The Orthodox Union, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Union of Reform Judaism have all addressed the need for inclusion, by compiling [resource guides](#), defining [mission statements](#), and establishing a [Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center](#).

[Rosh Pina Cornerstone](#) is an initiative that aims to [certify](#) Jewish institutions (synagogues, JCCs, camps and schools) as inclusive places, as the culmination of a year-long process of learning and community building. Another organization, Jewish Learning Venture (based in Pennsylvania), has created a rubric for [evaluating a synagogue's progress toward inclusiveness](#).

Beyond synagogues you can call local theaters to see if there is a show that accommodates people with disabilities. Sometimes, they offer movies with the lights on, or performances without strobe lights or loud music.

On a more specific scale, another consideration for the community is accommodating people with disabilities at Birthday parties and other public celebrations. Many people with disabilities have difficulty processing sensory information in busy environments. For instance, birthday parties may include loud activities, blinking lights, and smells of pizza, which, in its intensity and in combination can be overwhelming. Therefore, to make these events friendlier for people with disabilities, it is helpful to think about how these factors can be lessened. For instance, instead of booming loud music, softer music can be played or the volume can be lowered. Another idea is to avoid strobe lights or flickering lights, and to keep a light on in the back while playing movies to accommodate those who may be anxious in the dark.

One way to show willingness for making accommodations for friends with disabilities is to ask. Consider making a statement on the invitation like, "We want our friends to be as comfortable as possible at our event. Please let us know if there are any accommodations we can make to help you celebrate with us!" This way, specific people are not being targeting or stigmatized for needing accommodations and the host can learn an array of information about guests from a need for a wheelchair ramp to food allergies. Schools can reinforce the importance of making accommodations in the community by adding this to their parent handbook under expectations of birthday and holiday parties.

Networking, Social Opportunities, and Extracurricular Activities

In Brooklyn, there is an excellent resource for parents of children with disabilities called [Brooklyn Special Kids \(a Yahoo! group\)](#). Free membership is by request. Discussions range widely, from schooling and the IEP process, to afterschool programs and camps, recommendations of practitioners, and advice-seeking on behavioral or other issues experienced at home or at school. This group encompasses parents whose children have a very wide variety of disabilities, meaning it is always possible to learn from others' experience.

Additionally, [Extreme Kids and Crew](#), a Brooklyn community center for children with disabilities, maintains a [list of external resources](#) for people with disabilities. Organizations that have course offerings or programs that either include or address children with disabilities (such as the [92nd Street Y](#) and the [JCC Manhattan](#)) will list this information on their websites.

Outside of New York, call the local community center and see if there are courses offered, support groups, or integrated play opportunities.

Playdates

Parents of children with disabilities may need to spend more time thinking about their child's social interactions outside of school, where the inherent support of the classroom and teaching team is not present.

[This link](#) suggests a variety of approaches, reminding parents of children with disabilities to plan social opportunities with both children with disabilities as well as neurotypical children. One suggestion includes approaching playdate activities more incrementally, such as having a shorter playdate at home with a familiar child opposed to a long playdate with a new friend in a new setting. Another tip is to find another child with a common interest and let that interest guide the playdate. Further, recommendations include inviting the other child's parents to the playdate, which will add a pair of eyes to supervise the play. Lastly, if the playdate was not a success, try to determine what went wrong and adjust for the next time.

Talking to Your Children without Disabilities about Peers with Disabilities

When speaking to your child about their peers who have disabilities, it is important to remember to use language that is inclusive and fair. “It is your teachers’ jobs to make sure all of the friends in the class get what they need. Sometimes our friends need different things. When you need something, your teachers will make sure you get it.” Helping children to understand that all children have different needs that are being met by their teachers and their school will help create understanding and accepting students in our community.

Bullying

Luria Academy has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying. Children are encouraged to be a member of our Luria community with the Four Agreements in mind: Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Gentle, Be Respectful. The Four Agreements apply to how children treat themselves, their peers, their teachers, and their classroom environment. Teachers help students to reflect on the impact of their actions on other people.

Behavior Intervention Plans at School

A Behavior Intervention Plan, or BIP for short, should be implemented after all typical “tips and tricks” have been exhausted and a child is still not responding appropriately in a specific situation. For instance, a BIP might be used to help a child complete his classwork after trying strategies like writing down all the expectations, setting a timer so he knows when and how long to work, and giving several reminders to get started, all unsuccessfully. A BIP should be created by a team consisting of parents, classroom teachers, and administrators who know the student well. Older or more mature students should also be consulted in the creation of the BIP to ensure that the parameters seem “fair” and that the student wants to work toward the reinforcer. Additionally, there should be a designated person who oversees the implementation of the BIP which can be any of the teammates who helped create it along with the student.

When creating a Behavioral Plan, the first step is to define the behavior that you are looking to modify. This can only be one behavior at a time. For instance, the behavior can be, “When the bell rings, the student will sit on her spot on the circle for morning meeting.” It should not be, “When called, the student will attend a 10 minute mini-lesson with his eyes on teacher, hands in his lap and sitting crisscross applesauce” This would be three behaviors at once. Once the behavior is defined (and, when appropriate, put into age-appropriate terms) there needs to be agreement on the condition. For instance, if the student really values time on the class iPad, the condition can be, “When the bell rings, if Jonny sits in his spot on the rug within two minutes, he will earn five minutes on the iPad during Work Time!” This will only work if the goal is attainable and if the student values the reinforcer.

If there is difficulty finding a highly valued reinforcer in school, try asking the parent if there is something at home that be used in the condition. Try to stay away from food as we don’t want a bodily need to become a contingency on behavior and we don’t want students developing poor eating habits as a result.

Once effective, the BIP can be weaned off by having the student “trade in” his/her earned reinforcer for one on a less frequent schedule. For instance, instead of earning five minutes on the iPad every day, the student can earn 20 minutes on Friday. This will help the student maintain the behavior without an immediate reinforcer.

Important note: Some people mistake positive reinforcement for bribery. Positive reinforcement is a scientific way of strengthening a valued behavior that is determined to be beneficial to increase. Bribery is persuasion usually by illegal means. For example, it is positive reinforcement to give a child a sticker for brushing his teeth. It is bribery for an NBA coach to pay a basketball player \$10,000 to purposefully lose a game. This distinction is essential when speaking about behavior intervention plans and in the language used by parents, teachers and students.

Parent's Perspective

Deborah Wassertzug, mother of Jonah (Luria student since 2009) and Abraham (Luria student since 2012)

Our journey in having children with disabilities began at Luria. When Jonah started attending Luria Academy, he was not yet three years old. A month into the school year, I received a phone call from his teacher, expressing some concerns about behaviors she had observed in Jonah. Naturally, as his parents, my husband and I were consumed with feelings of confusion (we didn't know what this meant), guilt (was there something we should have picked up on? or done differently?) and apprehension. Luckily, the guidance we received from Luria and the agency that did our evaluation helped to destigmatize the process, and get Jonah the support he needs in the classroom.

Over the past six years, we have watched Jonah grow and develop and master skills that did not seem within his reach even three years ago. With the support of therapists working at Luria, and Luria teachers and school administration who take the time to truly understand each student and place his or her development within the proper context, Jonah has been able to not only survive, but also thrive. We have seen many of his developmental delays, which initially seemed to us insurmountable, prove themselves to be just that - delays, which he has managed to overcome with a lot of hard work (his, his therapists', and his teachers') and time. It is hard to imagine him having had this success or found this supportive of an environment at any other school.

What You Should Know About My Child

The following is an “oldie but a goodie” to keep in mind about the parent perspective. The student described is more “severe” than a typical Luria student, but the message is still a poignant one:

Remember that he is first of all my son. Let me see him smiling in his sleep and let me think about how handsome he is, not how delayed that smile was in coming. Help me not lose sight of my son in the shadow of his limitations.

I know you care for my son and that you work hard with him. I need your expertise in helping him become all that he is capable of being. You need my help in understanding who he is and in following through at home with things that are important.

Remember though that you send him home at night and have weekends off and paid vacations. Let me have the luxury of taking a vacation, sometimes physically, sometimes just emotionally for a day, a week, a month without your judging me. I will be there for him when you are long gone. I love my son with an intensity that you can only imagine. If on a given day I am tired or cross with him, listen to me, lighten my burden.

Celebrate with me. Rejoice in who he is, in who he will become, but forgive me if from time to time I shed a tear for who he might have been.

Excerpt from M.M. Bristol (May, 1987). Impact of Autistic Children on Families, an invited presentation at the 20th Anniversary Symposium, Autism: The Emotional and Social Dimensions. Sponsored by the League School, Park Plaza Hotel, Boston, MA

Terms and Acronyms

IEP: Individualized Education Program is an important legal document that includes a child's learning needs, the services that will be provided and how progress will be measured

BIP: Behavior Intervention Plan includes how the IEP Team will improve difficult behavior that inhibits the child's academic success

Person-first language: Disabilities do not define a person, therefore, avoid referring to a person as disabled-person (i.e. Instead of autistic-child, refer to him as a child with autism, which defines him first as a child, who is described as having autism)

Differentiated Instruction: Tailoring instruction to meet individual needs, which may include changing the content, process, product, or the learning environment

Positive Reinforcement: A response or behavior is strengthened by the addition of something, such as praise or a direct reward

Negative Reinforcement: A response is strengthened by the removal of an unpleasant stimulus

Inclusion: The educational practice of educating children with disabilities in classrooms with children without disabilities

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