Creating Access and Equity in New Church Classrooms

Developed by Brenna Sweeney, M.S.

A brief glance at Accommodations & Modifications and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as they relate to dyslexia, dyscalculia, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and sensory processing needs in New Church classrooms.

New Church Education

Educators know that schools provide the opportunity to impact the lives of children in profound ways. New Church schools seek to provide a spiritual overlay to all the learning that takes place. Teachers and staff, working together with parents, can explore the ways that God would have students conduct themselves. Education for usefulness is a core theme. Excellence in the craft of teaching is married to the desire to mentor students to become good human beings who wish to make the world a better place (New Church Vineyard, 2020).

In order to support learners who have difficulties accessing curriculum, who struggle with social and emotional stability, and who experience behavioral disruptions, educators can use accommodations & modifications as well as a universal design for learning (UDL) framework and mindset in the classroom. These educational supports can help students develop an academic, emotional, social, and behavioral foundation for spiritual principles.

Accommodations & Modifications

To learn more about accommodations, click here.

To learn more about modifications, click here.

Click the icon above for more information on accommodations and modifications.

Click the icon above to better understand the differences between accommodations and modifications.

Why accommodate and modify assignments? Click the icon above to better understand neurodiversity in students.

What Are They?

- An accommodation changes how a student learns the material. A modification changes what a student is taught or expected to learn.
- Accommodations can help students learn the same material as their peers. This allows them to meet the same expectations (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).
- Students who are far behind their peers may need changes to the curriculum they're learning. These are called modifications (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Key Concepts of Accommodations and Modifications:

- Fair does not mean equal: Students and some teachers may worry that having extra supports in place for some students gives them an unfair advantage. But it's important to remember that all students have individual strengths and needs. Accommodations and modifications are designed to level the playing field.
- Collaboration is critical: Partnering with special education staff and related service providers can help you understand the purpose of the accommodations and modifications.
- Students and their families are key partners: Ongoing communication and trusting relationships can help you learn more about how students are doing with the supports they're receiving.
- Planning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can eliminate extra work: Applying UDL principles in your lessons can meet the needs of the whole range of students in your classroom. By proactively anticipating barriers to learning, you can build in supports that help all students access the material.
- Students may not need to use an accommodation for every lesson: Some need accommodations in just one or two classes or subjects. Others might need them across the board. (Morin, 2014-2020).

Throughout this resource, specific accommodations and modifications will be marked with an asterisk* if they can be modified to meet the needs of virtual classrooms.

Assistive Technology (AT)

- Assistive technology is any device, software, or equipment that helps people work around their challenges. AT plays a large role in supporting accommodations and modifications. Click on the laptop to the right to read more about AT and how to implement this tool in your classroom (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Click the image above for a graphic organizer of UDL guidelines.

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. UDL minimizes barriers and maximizes learning for ALL students (CAST, 2018).

Breaking Down UDL:

- Universal: Curriculum that can be used and understood by everyone.
- Design: Flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate all learners.
- Learning: Our brains have three broad networks and every learner is unique. One size does not fit all (CAST, 2018).

Click above to check out this quick video about UDL.

Three Guidelines of UDL: Provide multiple means of...

- Engagement: For purposeful, motivated learners, stimulate interest and motivation for learning. The *why* of learning.
- Representation: For resourceful, knowledgeable learners, present information and content in different ways. The *what* of learning.
- Action & Expression: For strategic, goal-directed learners, differentiate the ways that students can express what they know. The *how* of learning (CAST, 2018).

Click the image above for a a UDL series of resources from understood.org:

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-Dyslexia-

What Is It?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, that results in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia often experience difficulties with both oral and written other language skills, such as writing, and pronouncing words and writing (International Dyslexia Association, 2020).

What it is and what it isn't

Things to Know: Dyslexia is...

- ...neurological and can be hereditary
- ...a phonological processing problem
- ...an issue with decoding, word recognition, spelling, accurate and fluent reading, and even writing and rhyming
- ...common: in 10% of the population (Witzel & Mize, 2018).
- ...a threat to reading comprehension
- ...a specific learning disability

Common Misconceptions: Dyslexia is not...

- ...a cognitive issue/a problem of intelligence
- ...a visual processing issue
- ...laziness
- ...curable
- ...letter-reversals and transpositions
- ...primarily a problem with language comprehension (but it can cause issues in reading comprehension)

What Does it look like?

Students with dyslexia typically have trouble reading fluently. They often read slowly and make mistakes. That can impact how well they comprehend what they read. But when other people read to them, they often have no problem understanding the text. Dyslexia can create difficulty with other skills, too. These include:

- Reading comprehension
- Spelling
- Writing
- Math

A key sign of dyslexia is trouble decoding words. This is the ability to match letters to sounds. Kids can also struggle with a more basic skill called phonemic awareness. This is the ability to recognize the sounds in words. Trouble with phonemic awareness can show up as early as preschool (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Click the icon to the right to watch a reading specialist explain how to pick a book for struggling readers:

Click the icon to the right to read about signs of dyslexia at different ages:

Accommodations and Modifications

Classroom Materials and Routines:

- Post visual schedules and also read them out loud.*
- Provide colored strips or bookmarks to help focus on a line of text when reading. Hand out letter and number strips so the student can see how to write correctly.
- Use large-print text for worksheets.*
- Use assistive tech like text-to-speech software, Reading Pen, speech-to-text software, and services like Bookshare.*
- Have on hand "hi-lo" books (books with high-interest topics for students reading below grade level).
- Provide extra time for reading and writing. Give the student multiple opportunities to read the same text.*
- Use reading buddies during work time (as appropriate). Partner up for studying—one student writes while the other speaks, or they share the writing (Morin, 2014).

Introducing New Concepts:

- Pre-teach new concepts and vocabulary.*
- Provide the student with typed notes or an outline of the lesson to help with taking notes. Provide advance organizers. Provide a glossary of content-related terms.*
- Use visual or audio support to help the student understand written materials in the lecture (Morin, 2014). *

Giving Instructions:

- Give, simplified, step-by-step directions and read written instructions out loud.*
- Highlight key words and ideas on worksheets for the student to read first.*
- Check in frequently to make sure the student understands and can repeat the directions.
- Show examples of correct and completed work to serve as a model. Provide a rubric that describes the elements of a successful assignment.*
- Help the student break assignments into smaller steps.*
- Give self-monitoring checklists and guiding questions for reading comprehension.*
- Arrange worksheet problems from easiest to hardest (Morin, 2014). *

Completing Test and Assignments:

- Grade the student on the content that needs to be mastered, not on things like spelling or reading fluency.*
- Allow understanding to be demonstrated in different ways, like oral reports, posters, and video presentations.*
- Provide different ways to respond to test questions, like saying the answers or circling an answer instead of filling in the blank.*
- Provide sentence starters that show how to begin a written response.*
- Provide extended time for taking tests.*
- Provide a quiet room for taking tests, if needed (Morin, 2014).

For more information on dyslexia, watch the video below:

Click below for a dyslexia fact sheet:

For parent resources, click below:

To learn more about the brain and dyslexia, click below:

Click below to view additional infographics about dyslexia and reading:

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-Dyscalculia-

What is it?

Dyscalculia is a math learning disorder that makes mathematical reasoning and computation difficult, in spite of adequate education, average or greater intelligence, and proper motivation. It appears as poor memory for numbers, time, sequences, directions, layouts, and visual-spatial information, as well as a confounding inability to manage these things (Hamilton, 1985-2021).

Quick Facts

- Dyscalculia is believed to affect 3% to 7% to 26% of the population (Hamilton, 1985-2021).
- For people with dyscalculia, performing number-related tasks produces mental confusion, anxiety, and distress (Hamilton, 1985-2021).
- Dyscalculics often display a lack of academic progress in mathematics, accompanied by average or advanced skills in speech, reading, writing, and other areas (Hamilton, 1985-2021).
- Two possible causes of dyscalculia: heredity/genes and brain development (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).
- Similar to dyslexia, dyscalculia is a specific learning disability (SLD). The DSM-V definition for SLD is, "A neurodevelopmental disorder of biological origin manifested in learning difficulties and problems in acquiring academic skills markedly below age level and manifested in the early school years, lasting for at least 6 months, not attributed to intellectual disabilities, developmental disorders, or neurological or motor disorders" (Hamilton, 1985-2021).
- Difficulty with math happens at all levels. It can be as hard to learn addition as it is to learn algebra. Basic concepts like quantities can also be a challenge. That's why dyscalculia can make it hard to do everyday tasks. Cooking, grocery shopping, and getting places on time all involve these basic math skills, which are known as number sense (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Click below to view a fact sheet about dyscalculia:

Click below to watch a video about dyscalculia:

What Does It Look Like?

Common signs of dyscalculia include trouble...

- grasping the meaning of quantities or concepts like biggest vs. smallest
- understanding that the numeral 5 is the same as the word five, and that these both mean five items
- remembering math facts in school, like times tables
- counting money or making change
- estimating time
- judging speed or distance
- understanding the logic behind math
- holding numbers in their head while solving problems (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

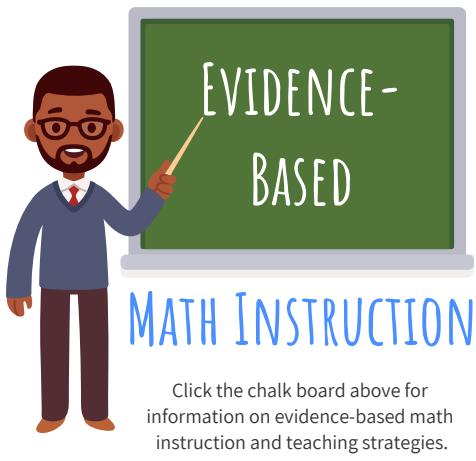
Accommodations and Modifications

Introducing New Concepts/Lessons

- Review what the student already learned before teaching new skills.*
- Teach students to "self-talk" through solving problems.*
- Let the student write out charts or draw sketches to solve problems.*
- Use graph paper to help line up numbers and problems.
- Give the student a list of the math formulas taught in the class.*
- Use like coins, blocks, and puzzles to teach math ideas.
- Use attention-getting phrases like, "This is important to know because…."*
- Use concrete examples that connect math to real life.*
- Check in frequently to make sure the student understands the work.
- Use graphic organizers to organize information or help break down math problems into steps (Morin, 2014-2020).*

Giving Instructions and Assignments

- Create separate worksheets for word problems and number problems. Highlight or circle key words and numbers on word problems.*
- Allow extra time on tests.*
- Give step-by-step instructions and have the student repeat them.*
- Provide charts of math facts or multiplication tables.* Use visual aids* or manipulatives when solving problems.
- Let the student use a calculator when computation isn't what's being assessed.*
- Give a rubric that describes the elements of an assignment.*
- Use an extra piece of paper to cover up most of what's on a math sheet or test to make it easier to focus on one problem at a time.
- Give more space to write problems and solutions.*
- Break down worksheets into sections* (Morin, 2014-2020).



Math Instruction

Click the chalk board above for information on evidence-based math instruction and teaching strategies.

Let's Be Clear

There are different terms for dyscalculia. Mathematics learning disability is one. Mathematics learning disorder is another. Some people call it math dyslexia or number dyslexia. This can be misleading. Dyslexia is a challenge with reading. Dyscalculia is a challenge with math (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

To learn more about the overlap with dyscalculia and dyslexia, click the icon below:

For additional resources, programs, statistics, and educational courses on dyscalculia, click the information graphic to the right:

For online games that support students with dyscalculia, click the icon to the right:

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-Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)-

What Is It?

ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Statistics

- The estimated number of children ever diagnosed with ADHD, according to a national 2016 parent survey, is 6.1 million (9.4%).
- Boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls (12.9% compared to 5.6%).
- About 5 in 10 children with ADHD had a behavior or conduct problem.
- About 3 in 10 children with ADHD had anxiety (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Click the image below to view a fact sheet on ADHD:

Click the image below to view a fact sheet on ADHD:

Click the image below to view a video on ADHD:

Click the image below to read about ADHD and the brain:

Accommodations and Modifications

Setting Up the Classroom Environment

- Use flexible seating, like wiggle chairs, standing desks, foot rests, seat cushions, or resistance bands on chair legs.
- Increase the space between desks or work tables.
- Designate a quiet work space in the classroom.
- Set up preferential seating close to the teacher and/or away from high-traffic areas.
- Post a written schedule for daily routines and rules. When possible, let the student know ahead of time about schedule changes* (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Building Organization Skills

- Use an assignment notebook or an electronic calendar.*
- Provide an extra set of books to keep at home.*
- Provide folders and baskets of supplies to keep desk organized.
- Color-code materials for each subject.
- Provide typed notes or an outline of the lesson to help with taking notes.*
- Teach note-taking strategies, like using graphic organizers and mind-mapping software.*
- Have a buddy take notes for the student* (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Giving Instructions

- Give directions out loud and in writing, and have the student repeat them.*
- Provide a lesson outline that details instructions and assignments.*
- Keep instructions simple, clear, and concrete.*
- Use pictures and graphs to help create visual interest.*
- Provide a rubric that describes the elements of a successfully completed assignment.*
- Help the student break long assignments into smaller chunks* (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

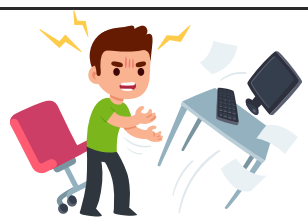
Managing Behavior

- Use a behavior plan with a reward system.*
- Use a nonverbal signal (like a sticky note on the desk or a hand on a shoulder) to get the student's attention and indicate the need for things like taking a brain break.*
- Talk through behavior problems one-on-one.*
- Check in frequently to monitor the student's "emotional temperature" or frustration level* (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Types of ADHD

There are three different types of ADHD, depending on which types of symptoms are strongest in the individual.
(Note: because symptoms can change over time, the presentation may change over time as well).

1. Predominantly Inattentive Presentation: It is hard for the individual to organize or finish a task, to pay attention to details, or to follow instructions or conversations. The student is easily distracted or forgets details of daily routines.
2. Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation: The student fidgets and talks a lot. It is hard to sit still for long (e.g., for a meal or while doing homework). Smaller children may run, jump or climb constantly. The individual feels restless and has trouble with impulsivity. Someone who is impulsive may interrupt others a lot, grab things from people, or speak at inappropriate times. It is hard for the student to wait their turn or listen to directions. A student with impulsiveness may have more accidents and injuries than others.
3. Combined Presentation: Symptoms of the above two types are equally present in the student (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).



How students struggle

Students with ADHD have trouble with executive function, which is the "management system" of the brain. Because of that, learners with ADHD often struggle with:

- Managing time
- Getting and staying organized
- Setting priorities
- Planning
- Managing emotions
- Paying attention and remembering things
- Shifting focus from one thing to another
- Getting started on and finishing tasks
- Thinking before saying or doing things (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Completing Tests and Assignments

- Allow understanding to be demonstrated in different ways, like oral reports, posters, and video presentations.*
- Provide different ways to respond to test questions, like saying the answers or circling them.*
- Minimize the number of questions and problems per worksheet.*
- Schedule frequent short quizzes, rather than one long test at the end of each unit.*
- Give credit for work done instead of taking away points for late or partial assignments (with a plan for moving toward completing assignments).*
- Grade for content, not for neatness.*
- Give extra time* and quieter space for work and tests.

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-Sensory Processing Issues-

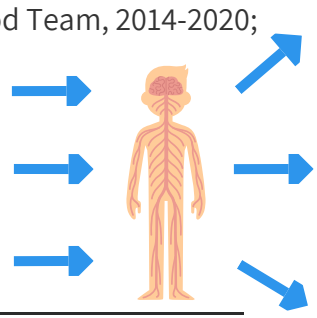
What Is It?

Sensory processing issues are difficulties with organizing and responding to information that comes in through the senses. Students may be oversensitive to sensory input, under-sensitive, or both (The Understood Team, 2014-2020). Sensory processing problems are considered a symptom of autism (ASD), but many children with sensory issues do not have ASD. Sensory issues can be found in learners with ADHD, OCD, other developmental delays, or with no other diagnosis at all (Arky, 2020).

How Does It Work?

Our brains are constantly taking in information from our senses (the five senses, proprioceptive receptors, and vestibular receptors). The brains of students with sensory processing issues cannot synthesize all of the sensory information coming in at once, which can result in a variety of reactions (The Understood Team, 2014-2020; Arky, 2020).

- Five Senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch.
- Movement (proprioceptive receptors).
- Balance (vestibular receptors).



Click on the icon to the right for a sensory processing fact sheet.

Click on the icon to the right to view a video about sensory processing issues.

- Hyposensitivity: learners who are under-sensitive to input. They look for more sensory input and are known as "sensory seekers." Kids who sensory seek may look clumsy, be a little too loud or seem to have “behavior issues.”
- Hypersensitivity: learners who are over-sensitive to input. They are known as "sensory avoiders." They try to avoid sensory input because they experience it more intensely than the average person. (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).
- Combination: Not all kids are clearly sensory seekers or sensory avoiders. Some kids may show a combination of these reactions. That’s because their responses can change based on their level of arousal or how well they’re able to self-regulate.

Accommodations and Modifications

General Supports:

- Check out these 13 ways to help grade-schoolers with sensory processing issues handle everyday challenges at school.
- Here are 15 ways to help kids who are sensitive to touch.
- Visual sensitivity? Here are 6 ways to help.
- Here are 7 ways to help kids who are sensitive to noise.
- Know the difference: Tantrum vs. Meltdown- how to help students work through a tantrum and how to help those who are experiencing a sensory meltdown.
- Sensory-friendly classroom seating (low cost too).

Classroom Planning, Schedules, and Routines:

- Have a daily routine that changes as little as possible. Give advance warning of routine changes.
- Build in brain breaks throughout the day.
- Establish clear starting and ending times for tasks.
- Post visual schedules, directions, class rules and expectations; make sure the student sees them. *
- Use visuals with pictures of sensory input choices. (Print a PDF of options.) (Morin, 2014-2020).

Building Self-Regulation Skills:

- Provide a quiet work space to use when needed.
- Seat the student away from doors, windows, or buzzing lights. Let the student sit on a carpet square or beanbag during group seating. Let the student work in a different position, like lying on the floor using a clipboard or at an easel.Let the student use alternative seating, like an exercise ball or a stand-up desk.
- Adjust the desk and chair so the student’s feet are flat on the floor and hips are at a 90-degree angle, or put a footstool under the desk.
- Consult with the occupational therapist (OT) about attaching a stretchy exercise band to the chair legs or desk for students who need to bounce their feet.
- Provide a weighted lap pad, weighted vest, wiggle cushion, or other OT-approved sensory tools.
- Provide earplugs or noise-muffling headphones to help with noise sensitivity.
- Let the student use handheld fidgets; consider using a fidget contract.
- Have chewing gum available or attach a chewable item to the end of a pencil for a sensory-seeking student.
- Let the student move as needed within a space outlined in tape or at a seat to the side.
- Work with the student to come up with nonverbal signals to use when overwhelmed or in need of a break.*
- Create a proactive behavior plan for handling sensory triggers.*
- Give advance warning and verbal reminders of loud noises like bells, announcements, or planned fire alarms (Morin, 2014-2020).

What does it look like?

These are some common examples of things kids seek and avoid from those senses.

- Sight: Visual patterns, certain colors or shapes, moving or spinning objects, and bright objects or light.
- Smell: Specific smells. Some kids like to smell everything, while some kids are able to detect—and object to—smells that other people don’t notice.
- Hearing: Loud or unexpected sounds like fire alarms or blenders, singing, repetitive or specific types of noises (like finger snapping or clapping).
- Taste: Specific tastes (like spicy, sour, bitter, or minty) and textures (like crunchy, chewy, or mushy), chewing or sucking on non-food objects (like shirt sleeves or collars).
- Touch: Touch from other people, touching and fiddling with objects, tight or soft clothing, and certain textures or surfaces (The Understood Team, 2014-2020).

Giving Instructions and Assignments

- Reduce the need for handwriting (for example, use fill-in-the-blank questions instead of short-answer questions).*
- Allow extra time for writing to accommodate motor skills fatigue and trouble with proprioception.*
- Let the student use speech-to-text software or a computer.*
- Reduce the amount of visual information on a page.*
- Provide colored overlays for reading to reduce visual distraction.*
- Use blank pieces of paper to cover all but a few of the questions on a page.
- Use manila folders as a screen to block visual distractions.
- Offer pencil grips, slant boards, and bold or raised-line paper for writing.
- Use a highlighter or sticky notes to help the student stay alert and focused.
- Allow the student to listen to music while working to keep focused and regulated (Morin, 2014-2020).*

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-Personal Statement-

Brenna Sweeney, M.S. Special Education

While I have only just begun my full-time teaching career in a New Church classroom, I have had years of exposure to this unique and special learning environment, both as a student and as a part-time educator and aide. I came to realize that, while students are receiving a quality and multi-dimensional education, there are learners who seem to have academic, emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties in the classroom, creating barriers to optimal learning.

Given the small, private school nature of New Church schools, there can be a lack of resources for teachers in how to properly support diverse learners in their classrooms. After the recent completion of my graduate program in special education, I found myself wanting to help New Church educators, both within my own building and in other schools as well, by providing them with a digital resource of accommodations and modifications for disability areas that are commonly present within my own school.

It is my hope that educators can harness these resources to meet the needs of their students, and create an equitable and accessible learning experience within their New Church classrooms. With these educational supports in place, learners can grow academically, emotionally and socially, which in turn improves classroom behaviors and overall student success. It is with this foundation that students can reach their ultimate potential and graduate into adulthood, where they can confidently share their unique talents and abilities with those around them, and perform acts of charity within their communities.

“The goal of education is use. In other words, all education looks towards the preparation for a use in adult life. Use is the result of the application of all of those abilities that have been gradually growing during the period of [childhood]. Free choice, rationality, conscience, character…all these enter into and combine to make up what is called ‘use.’”

–George DeCharms

-References-

http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.Xy806ZNKigQ

- This website provides engaging guides to incorporating Universal Design for Learning in the classroom. The CAST team consists of trusted professionals in the field of education who encourage student-centered learning. In addition to the easy-to-reference charts on this website are other resources to support educators in implementing universal framework.

https://www.understood.org/

- This is an excellent resource for both educators and parents who are seeking support for their students with dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD, and/or sensory processing needs. I have used this website countless times throughout my teaching career, and it is easily one of my favorites.

https://dyslexiaida.org/

- Specific to dyslexia, this website not only offers information about this disability, but local resources, programs, and memberships for teachers and parents. In addition, this source can support private schools in understanding how to better identify and support learners with dyslexia in the classroom.

https://www.dyscalculia.org/

- Specific to dyscalculia, this website provides excellent information and resources for teachers who work with students with math disabilities. This website contains legal advice, statistics, professional development, and ready-to-use resources in the classroom.

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/index.html

- While the CDC is typically referred to for statics and research purposes, there is additional information on their web pages regarding ADHD that can be supportive to parents who are trying to better understand ADHD symptoms and treatments.

https://childmind.org/article/sensory-processing-issues-explained/

- Although this website was only utilized on the page concerning sensory processing needs, the Child Mind Institute has a deep list of articles for teachers and parents who have students with various disorders. Another one of my favorite resources, this website never fails to offer thoughtful and resourceful articles that are written by specialists and professionals in the field.