THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED STUDENT

Description:

The essential feature of mental retardation or a developmental disability is significant sub-average intellectual functioning. This is accompanied by substantial limitations in adaptive functioning in at least two of the following skill areas: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health and safety. Individuals that are moderately disabled tend to be significantly more impacted socially. During adolescence their difficulties in recognizing social conventions may interfere with peer relationships and involvement in group activities, such as classroom settings. Unless intervention occurs, this impairment continues with these individuals for the rest of their lives.

Adaptive functioning can be influenced by various factors, including education, motivation, personality characteristics, social and vocational opportunities, and the mental disorders and medical conditions that may coexist with this disability. With appropriate supports, individuals with this disability can usually live independently or in supervised settings. Problems in adaptation are more likely to improve with remedial efforts, supervision and direct, clear communication.

Response:

The following actions may be helpful:

1. Send clear, consistent messages regarding what behavior you expect from the student. Talk slowly and remain calm.
2. Set precise limits with them and consistently reinforce those limits with the student each time s/he is inappropriate. Repetition is important.
3. Set limits regarding your contact with the student.
4. Have the student repeat back to you what you have said to insure the student clearly understands what is expected. You may choose to do this after class in order to safeguard the student’s dignity.
5. Refer student for services if deemed appropriate.
6. Contact Disabled Students Programs and Services at 242-7990 for information on strategies that may be of further assistance.

The following will not be helpful in dealing with the developmentally disabled student:

1. Getting into an argument or “power struggle.”
2. Pressing for explanations for their behavior (they may not have the cognitive capacity required to define what you are asking).
3. Looking away and not dealing with the situation. This student especially benefits from clear, direct communication related to stopping inappropriate behaviors.