

1. Recognising girls who need more support to take part in learning



A common argument that needs challenging is:

‘Only medical experts should identify children with disabilities. It is not the responsibility of teachers.’

Educators often express this view about learners with disabilities because they lack the confidence to take action themselves, but this can leave many children and young people excluded.

It is true that specialist medical knowledge may be needed to diagnose and plan how to respond to a particular condition. You may already know from assessments conducted by relevant government services or disability specialist staff or agencies, which learners have been identified as having a sensory/physical impairment or a learning disability, or that the learners may be waiting to be assessed. However, this assessment might take a long time and be difficult to arrange, or girls may arrive at your Hub with a formal identification. As a Community Educator there are several things that you can do recognise and support children, even without a specialist assessment of the girl’s condition. The accompanying documents in this Directory on teaching approaches for these specific conditions will be helpful in supporting your teaching.



In your role as a Community Educator what can you do?

Every day observe your learners closely to see if any of them seem to be finding the lesson difficult and make changes to your teaching to help them.

Look out for...

- girls who concentrate and behave well, and those who find it hard to focus after a short time or disrupt the lesson
- those who have friends and those who seem to be alone
- girls who do not move around the class or the school grounds very much
- those who are less coordinated or have trouble forming their writing
- girls who often join in and put up their hand, and those who are silent or reluctant to take part
- girls who may present an unbalanced score card may do well in literacy and poorly in numeracy and vice versa
- those who do not listen or watch attentively
- girls who seem to struggle to speak, listen, walk, see, concentrate or respond to instruction.

Some of the learners that you identify as struggling may need specialist help that you are unable to provide, but you will still be able to think about things that you can do to help them before they receive a medical diagnosis, for example, provide preferential seating arrangements. You will be able to discuss this with your school buddy and district coordinator.

Talk to SAGE colleagues about your learners' situations

- Don't think of some girls as 'good' and 'well behaved', while others are 'disorganised' or 'disruptive'. Instead, describe the way they learn and behave without using words like 'good' and 'bad'. Many educators find it helpful to write down these descriptions after they have observed a learner's behaviour.
- Talk about what you have observed to your school buddy, other Community Educators, and the girl's parents or other family members. It is unlikely that you have the medical skills to diagnose a girl's condition, but your District Coordinator or Community Mobiliser may be able to offer advice or support, or to arrange for a pupil's behaviour to be looked at by a specialist.
- Enlisting parental/guardian support is critical as they can provide vital information about the learner.
- Focus on what learners can do (capabilities), rather than incapability so they can start by experiencing success in learning.

Talk to the learner

- Ask the girls themselves what they find easy/difficult about the Hub and the activities that you give them. A very effective idea can be to ask them to draw a picture of their perfect Hub 'classroom' and talk about their reasons for the design and the things in it.
- Ask groups of learners whether some of them find anything about the 'classroom' particularly difficult.
- Frequently ask whether anyone is unable to see the blackboard easily or hear what you are saying. Check that everyone has a comfortable place to sit, and can get to the toilet easily and use it safely.



Task: When you are familiar with all your girls, include information in your **Progress Books** about what you notice about them:

- Write down which girls have difficulties with different aspects of the learning environment. This will help you remember what you have observed. It will help you to think about what changes you can make to help them feel comfortable in the classroom, and to make learning easier for them.
- Write down your observations in a factual way.
- Your observations might include:
 - Physical skills – walking, running, carrying/holding items, forming letters and numbers when writing, speaking clearly
 - Social skills – talking, listening, taking turns, sharing or playing together
 - Daily living skills – such as speaking in sentences, being able to draw a specific object, understanding the rules of a game.

This will help you support the learning of all learners.

Reference:

Adapted from: INEE (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) (2010), *INEE Pocket Guide to Supporting Learners with Disabilities*, Geneva: INEE.

http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1138/INEE_Pocket_Guide_Learners_w_Disabilities.pdf

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<http://www.open.ac.uk/about/international-development/projects-and-programmes/gate-girls-access-education>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=2579>

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