



FIGHTING WORDS

The write to right.

Advice for Working with Children with Additional Needs

Every child and young person is different. All of them have a story to tell. Some are bilingual; some have learning differences; some are unusually gifted; some get bored easily; and some (most, really) would rather sit around eating crisps and watching TikTok while the dog finishes their homework.

At Fighting Words, we frequently work with children and young people who have been identified as those with additional needs – sometimes they are in a mainstream class, sometimes they are in a group from a special group or support service and sometimes they come to us at summer camps.

The advice that follows is provided to support our volunteer mentors to support these young writers. If you have any questions about individual children, please ask a member of staff. Teachers and parents are usually very happy to provide advice about how best to support individual children.

Remember, all children and young people are individuals - don't expect them to behave in a certain way. Some children and young people may present as very socially able and chatty. Others may appear withdrawn or quiet and may have difficulties communicating. Meet each individual as you find them.

The advice below also applies to all children, regardless if they have additional needs or not – they are great approaches for working with everyone who attends our programmes.

Most of all, don't worry! As with any child or young person we work with, be enthusiastic, patient and kind.

Here are some tips for tackling individual issues.

The student can't focus: This, by far, is the most common problem. Often it is because the students simply do not understand the exercise, so the first step is to make sure they comprehend what they are being asked to do and know how to do it. If you are encountering a child struggling to engage, you can:

- Check they understand the task. Explain it to them and answer any questions that they might have.

- Have a chat! Sometimes a child cannot focus because they are nervous. Ask them about their day so far, smile and make a joke – let them know that you are there to help.
- Sometimes a child will start out very focused and become distracted later. Encourage them to read their work to you and offer lots of encouragement and suggestions.
- Suggest a movement break or a glass of water and then bring their attention back to the story.
- Suggest sharing their work with a friend.
- Give a relaxed deadline by saying, “Great, get those ideas down and I’ll check with you in x minutes.”

Boring!: Sometimes the student may not like the sound of the task set. Discuss what aspects they don’t like and help them to find their own version of it that they can engage in and enjoy. Try making a game out of the work. You can set a time limit on writing a sentence or take turns to come up with sentences.

The student has a learning difference: As with all participants, the main point to remember is to have patience. Volunteer mentors will be made aware of students with learning differences in advance and be provided with any information required so that the task is enjoyable and fulfilling for everyone.

The key is adapting to the participant’s style of working and finding an activity or pace that is right for them. Again, as with all participants, listen carefully, be patient and give plenty of encouragement.

Remember that students with learning differences may see things in a different way that will, in some cases, help them to solve problems. Dyslexic students, for example, often have very advanced oral skills, so you may want to spend a lot of time talking out their ideas and discussing how the story will proceed, before starting to write. Autistic students or students with ADHD often do well with a lot of repetition.

Students who require additional support: There are many students who require additional support, such as students as who use English as an additional language, students with anxiety or ADHD or autistic students.

Some tips:

- Use simple, clear language – avoid idioms or slang.
- Encourage informal conversation before any writing takes place.
- Offer to scribe for them, listening carefully to their ideas and helping them to structure sentences.

- Encourage them to draw or make a storyboard of their ideas if they are finding it difficult to express a particular idea in words.
- Avoid telling them what they have written or said is incorrect. Demonstrate the appropriate English by repeating back what they have said or writing it down.
- Use visual props whenever possible. Find out what the student is interested in and adapt the exercise accordingly. If they like football, for example, suggest that they write about football.
- Writing – and thinking about writing – can be tiring. Offer to take a movement break and come back to the table if necessary.
- Use a bilingual dictionary to translate when confusion arises. If you need more help and there are no bilingual mentors around, ask another bilingual student to help and/or check with staff and/or the class teacher.

The student demonstrates challenging behaviour: Almost always, Fighting Words students are very well behaved. Occasionally, however, they might get a little disruptive.

This can be for a variety of reasons – perhaps they are finding the task difficult, they are tired something has happened recently to upset them or perhaps there is a problem at school or at home.

Don't worry – there are strategies for managing those situations.

- Let the child know their behaviour is unacceptable with statements such as, "You could hurt yourself or someone else by doing that. I need you to stop." Or: "You are using language that does not belong here. Please stop."
- If you feel certain that children are not getting along, or are simply distracting each other too much, ask the workshop leader or a member of staff about reshuffling the room.
- Gently remind participants that they should listen to each other and avoid talking during the sharing part of the workshop in order to demonstrate respect for everyone's creativity.
- Model positive behaviour by listening when the workshop leader or other children are speaking.
- If a student has destroyed some of their work, save what you can – calmly, take the paper from the corner of the room, unfold it, sit next

to the young person and say what was good about the work. Explain that it was a good start and that you were really pleased with it, that the student would probably benefit from transcribing it on a fresh page. From then, the child or young person can extend on the great start that has been made.

Our mentors are here to mentor, not discipline, so staff members - or the teachers who always accompany class groups - will handle serious situations.

The student tells you something disturbing: This is a *very* rare occurrence, but should a student tell you anything that causes concern, please tell a staff member **immediately**. We will take it from there, in line with our child protection policy and procedures. See the Child and Vulnerable Adult Policy for full details.

Tips for working with a group

1. If one child requires more attention than the others, don't worry about giving it to them. Check in with the rest of the group regularly and remind them that you are still available if they need your help.
2. Encourage whole group or paired discussion if you feel they will benefit from hearing different ideas but set a time limit.
3. If you feel that one child is causing problems in the group, suggest that you work with them separately. Avoid having the child feel that they are "in trouble" by explaining that you want to hear what they have been doing and work with them on their ideas.
4. Suggest to other members of the volunteer team that they step in to provide extra help if necessary.

Fighting Words Positive Behaviour Policy

What does "positive behaviour" mean? At Fighting Words, we aim to ensure that the individuality of each child is accommodated while acknowledging the right of each child to take part in our programmes.

At our summer programmes and other workshops outside of the school time, parents and guardians are provided with our Positive Behaviour Policy, which sets out the standards of behaviour we expect from all the participants in our programmes.