
Chapter 1

What Do Special Education Teachers Do?

Each day in the United States millions of children go off to school, all with different strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities. Over five million of these children have been identified as having a specific disability, including autism, mental retardation, or cerebral palsy; emotional, physical, visual, or hearing disabilities; or learning disabilities that necessitate some type of special instruction. These children are referred to as children with disabilities or children with special needs. To address these children's special needs, schools rely on people who have been trained to help them: special education teachers. Special education teachers play a critical role in the proper education of exceptional students, in their daily lives, and in their long-term achievements in learning. As you will soon realize, this is a role that can change the course of a child's life, placing that child on a road to positive self-worth, a sense of accomplishment, and assimilation into society.

Special educators work in many settings and play many roles. Whatever the setting or role, they are sure to encounter a variety of situations that require making practical decisions and relevant suggestions. No matter what role you will play in special education, you will need to understand fully symptoms, causality, evaluation, diagnosis, prescription, and remediation. You will have to communicate vital information to professionals, parents, and students. You will encounter a whole new language, with lots of terminology and abbreviations, and you will need to know it and recognize it. There is no doubt that you will need to learn a great deal, have a good base of knowledge in legal and educational areas, and be ready for an exciting, rewarding, but demanding profession.

This survival guide is designed to give you the basic knowledge you will need.

