

# How do I Suggest Disability Resources to a Student in my Class?

When students seem to be having problems, but it's unclear whether they have a disability, it's important that staff and faculty do not assume or ask directly if they have a disability. However, you can discuss the issues of concern with them and they might choose to share disability information with you, which would allow you to refer them to the Center for Disability Services (CDS). If they do not indicate that they have a disability, then you can give them a list of campus resources and include Disability Services in that list. Below are some suggestions about how you can discuss this with the student.

**First:** Focus on the behavioral symptoms or problems you have observed, rather than the diagnosis, such as:

- "I notice that you seem to have difficulty finishing tests in the allotted time since the last few questions are usually left blank".
- "I notice that you seem to struggle over similar problems in each writing assignment... (describe reversed letters, spelling with certain words, word usage of certain words, etc.)"
- "I notice that you seem to have problems holding the pen when you write/ leaning over to write/ sitting for long periods of time/ etc."
- "I notice that you seem to have difficulty understanding the directions for homework, quizzes..."
- "I notice from your test answers that you may not be understanding/ comprehending the questions... or is it that you are having difficulty seeing the questions clearly?"
- "I notice that you seem to get assignments done but have difficulty organizing your time or remembering to turn them in on time..."

**Second:** Ask the student if this pattern is familiar, or something that they or someone else has noticed. For example:

- "Does my description fit what you are experiencing?" (allow them to describe the problem from their perspective... it could be related to something entirely different from a disability... or it could be a very different problem than you imagined... e.g., chronic pain rather than a vision or cognitive problem.)
- "Have you had problems like this when you attended school (previous college or high school, depending on their age) or in a work setting?"
- "What strategies help you avoid or reduce this problem?"

**Third (option 1)** If the student says "Oh yeah, I've always had these problems and:

- thought maybe I had a disability, or
- was in special classes, or
- received accommodations, or
- was in a resource room, or
- worked with a Special Ed teacher, or
- was on an IEP, etc."

then you can encourage them to check in with the Disability Services Coordinator to see if they would be eligible for services and accommodations.

**Third (option 2)** If the student is not forthcoming with any clues about possibly having a disability, then you can say: "If you'd like to explore resources on campus that might be able to assist you with these problems, I suggest you contact some of these departments to see if they can help". Then give them a list of resources and include Disability Services in that list, but don't particularly emphasize it over any of the others.

- Academic Advising
- Disability Services
- Tutoring Services
- Counseling

When in doubt, call the Center for Disability Services to get advice about how to discuss your concerns with the student.

Adapted from Lane College website