



5 tips to prevent distractions, improve student focus during virtual lessons

Virtual instruction presents unique challenges for special educators that may not occur in the school setting. One problem that educators may face is maintaining the attention of students with disabilities during an online lesson. This may make it more difficult for staffers to provide students the special education and related services they need to succeed in the virtual classroom. Although teachers providing virtual instruction may not be able to redirect students or provide them supports in person, they may still take certain steps to improve the focus of special education students in their class. The chart below outlines five tips that may help teachers reduce distractions in the virtual classroom.

Tip	How it helps
1. Implement security measures to ensure only students gain access to the virtual classroom.	<p>Some video conferencing platforms may allow unknown individuals to access virtual classrooms that are open to the public. To prevent unauthorized intrusions and interruptions, educators should implement security measures to protect their virtual classrooms.</p> <p>A teacher may, for example, create a virtual classroom that is protected by a unique password. The teacher can then provide the password to the parent of each student with a disability who will attend the class. Additionally, some video conferencing apps have a feature that allow teachers to "approve" the individuals who request to join a virtual classroom. These types of security protections will ensure that only authorized students can enter the virtual classroom.</p>
2. Limit students' messages and voice chat during lectures.	<p>Students with disabilities in virtual classrooms may occasionally want to socialize with their peers. For example, some students who are participating in a virtual class may speak out of turn or send messages to each other. Others may engage in vocalizations when they are experiencing intense feelings, such as excitement or frustration. These instances of social interaction and vocal feedback may make it more difficult for students with disabilities to focus on classwork and retain information. They may also cause multiple interruptions in the teacher's lesson.</p> <p>To address these situations, some video conferencing apps and services allow the "host" of a virtual classroom (i.e., the teacher) to mute students and restrict their text chat functions. That way, a teacher may start the class, complete her lesson, and subsequently "open up" the voice and message functions so that students may ask relevant questions or participate in a group discussion.</p>
3. Control "screen-sharing."	<p>Screen-sharing within a video conferencing app may be a helpful tool for special education teachers during instruction. A teacher could, for instance, use the "screen-sharing" feature in a video conferencing app to show students with disabilities images and slideshows related to her lesson for the day. However, students may also be able to use the same feature to share their computer screens with each other.</p> <p>If possible, teachers should restrict or disable the screen-sharing feature for students during the virtual lesson. This will prevent students from changing what their classmates' see on their screens during class. Teachers may then enable the screen-</p>

	sharing function for students when appropriate, such as when students want to present individual projects or participate in a group share activity.
4. Take breaks.	Students with disabilities attending a virtual lesson may need just as many breaks as they would if they attended class at school. Teachers should remember to take quick breaks during instruction, especially if certain students in the class need to go to the bathroom, take medications, or eat snacks to address their medical needs. These breaks will help students refocus once the teacher restarts the lesson.
5. Coordinate with parents.	<p>Unlike the school setting, teachers providing instruction in a virtual classroom do not have much control over a student's environment. For example, a teacher may be unable to eliminate noise and activity in the home that could distract a student with ADHD from the online lesson. Accordingly, it is important for teachers to coordinate with parents as much as possible to prevent outside distractions and interruptions.</p> <p>A teacher could, for instance, speak with parents to obtain information about the location of the student's computer and how to optimize that location for learning. If a student with autism is routinely distracted by the presence of a tablet or television in the room, the teacher could ask the parent to move the student's computer to a room with no electronic devices. Similarly, the teacher may ask the parents to postpone any loud activities, such as telephone conversations, until the lesson is over.</p>

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