

# A Guide for Understanding and Supporting Students with Developmental Disorders

## Linking Recognition to a Support Network

### • Introduction

The enrollment of students who have been diagnosed with (or have unrecognized) Developmental Disorders (DDs) is increasing at universities today. Equal to all other students, students with DDs have an eagerness to learn and a richness of inspiration and creativity. However, they have a greater tendency to struggle academically and socially, such as with completing tasks and/or participating in group activities. These students may fail to fulfill their academic potential in the absence of appropriate support.

The various areas where students with DDs experience difficulties include academics, personal relationships, communication and life skills management. Understanding individual difficulties caused by these disorders and adjusting students' learning environments in a reasonable manner will support them in pursuing their academic goals. Such arrangements also help faculty members and other students to better understand and have a clearer outlook on how to learn together with students struggling with DDs.

This guide explains how to link the recognition of such students in the classroom by faculty to a concrete support network in order to facilitate the functioning of a healthy learning community that includes students with DDs.

Faculty understanding and cooperation regarding this matter is essential and highly appreciated.

### • About Developmental Disorders – Understanding from a Medical Standpoint

The unique characteristics of DDs are manifestations of cognitive processing differences in the central nervous networking system. The following are the most common developmental disorders observed among college students:

#### [Autism Spectrum Disorder]

##### **\*High Functioning Autism • Asperger's Disorder • Pervasive Developmental Disorders**

Students with these disorders do not have impaired intellectual abilities, but have difficulties in the areas of interpersonal relationships, communication and behavior due to their restricted interests and preoccupations. Behavioral difficulties often observed in these students include stereotypical/fixed patterns of speech and mismatched reactions in certain contexts, such as small group or seminar style classes where students are expected to engage in discussion. Since they have difficulty perceiving others' feelings, they often fail to establish mutual understanding.

#### [Specific Learning Disorder]

##### **\*Learning Disorders**

Students with this disorder also do not have impaired intellectual abilities, but have difficulties in specific or multiple areas of academic or functional skills, including the ability to speak, listen, read, write, do math, and reason. In a university context, they may have difficulty taking notes during lectures or remembering important information. They may mishear what is said and respond oddly although they do not have a hearing problem. Their opinion may have a lack of consistency or rationale, and they may need to read aloud to understand written text.

#### [Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder]

Students with this disorder are characterized by excessive levels of inattention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity compared with the individual's age group, which may impede a wide range of social activities. For instance, students

with ADHD may fail to submit their homework or be late for classes due to difficulty in managing and organizing their time and belongings. They may also miss appointments, avoid difficult tasks and devote themselves to their personal interests to the point of disrupting their daily schedule.

## ● About Students with Developmental Disorders

- A student who appears to be a “troublemaker” may be a student “facing troubles.”

It is every student’s task to adjust to the university environment while becoming a self-directed learner. This task is, however, extremely difficult to achieve for students with DDs.

The following case examples show some overt characteristics students may display when facing difficulties. There may be several different reasons why students cannot solve these problems without support.

Students who are always late and/or miss classes:

Possible reasons • •

- They cannot prioritize or decide how much they should do for each step of preparation before leaving home, making it impossible to come to class on time.
- They cannot tolerate the hustle and bustle of the crowded campus due to their auditory hypersensitivity.
- They could not participate during the first group discussion and they irrationally judged that they are alienated from other students or they are not qualified to continue the class.



Students who do not participate in group work or discussions:

Possible reasons • •

- They cannot retain what they heard in their memory, so fail to follow the discussion.
- They don’t know what they are supposed to answer when asked vaguely “what do you think?”
- They keep worrying about being disliked for making inappropriate comments.
- They feel they are personally attacked or denied whenever they hear different opinions.



Students who never submit their assignments by the deadline:

Possible reasons • •

- They try to use their schedule book to write down the deadline, but fail to keep the book with them.
- They cannot take notes when important information is announced orally, or cannot recognize what information is important for them to write down.
- They have a hard time planning in advance, managing time and prioritizing, so cannot judge when to start or how much time it will take to complete.
- They are supposed to check their mailing list or online bulletin (e.g. campus web), but cannot sort out the important information.



Students who do not complete report assignments, or have extremely poor writing:

For example, when they are given the following assignment directions • • •

“Choose the topic you are most interested in and discuss your opinion.” (No word limit)

- They are confused by the ambiguity and do not know how to pick one topic from many choices, or what criteria they should base their choice on.
- They can write about what they know or learn, but they cannot write their opinion because there is no clear right answer.
- They cannot decide how much they should write.
- Choosing correct conjunctions becomes a great challenge to them, for example, wondering whether they should use the word “however,” or “although.”



## ● How to Use the Student Support System: - Linking Recognition in the Classroom to a Support Network

As mentioned above, there are many abilities and skills which most university students naturally acquire and students with DDs do not. There are still many students who do not realize that they have disorders and do not have any way of knowing that the cause of their struggles originates from the characteristics of their DDs. Since these students also do not have help-seeking skills, attentive observation and recognition by faculty becomes a crucial opportunity for them to connect to the appropriate support they need.

### ① Report the presence of struggling students.

If you notice a student who demonstrates serious academic problems such as those mentioned above, contact the following core members of the student support network:

- Department Office (that the student is registered with)
- Disability Resource Center (DRC)

\*See page 6

### ② Share further details of students' conditions and issues with the department office and/or the DRC.

The following information from faculty is very helpful to assess the needs of students and determine appropriate support:

- rate of attendance, quizzes and test taking records, submission of assignments
- any serious academic concerns based on the content of the students' writing assignments
- the way the students interact with peers in group activities or other classroom settings

### ③ Be an active member of the support network by collaborating with the department office and the DRC.

The two basic approaches of support are: 1) identification and verbalization of the problem, and 2) visualization and structuring of information.

The following are some examples of these basic approaches.



#### Students who are always late and/or miss classes:

- Initiate conversation in private, and discuss the student's life to understand and identify reasons for their lateness or absence.
- Suggest them to seek some tips for managing their time and living conditions (department office, Office of Student Affairs, DRC, senior students, peer supporters)

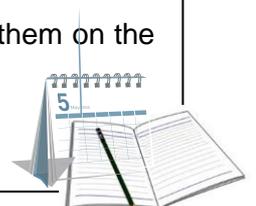


#### Students who do not participate in group work or discussion:

- Illustrate the topics and procedures of the discussion on the whiteboard so that the students can keep track of the discussion.
- Assign a note-taker in advance and suggest that students check the notes in order to better follow the discussion.
- Request a peer supporter (Orator/Entor) to assist the students in joining group work.
- Suggest to get professional consultation regarding their concerns and worries (department office, Office of Student Affairs, DRC).
- Set a separate opportunity for the student to state their opinions and comments regarding the ..

#### Students who never submit their assignments by the deadline:

- Indicate the deadline for assignments or the date of exams on handouts or show them on the whiteboard.
- Have a brief check after class regarding dates that assignments are due.
- Show a step-by step procedure to complete the assignment.



**Students who do not complete report assignments, or have extremely poor writing:**

- Show how to narrow down the topics or choose references based on their personal interests.
- Explain (show an example of) the basic structures of academic writing, such as paragraph composition and the proper length of a report.
- For a long paper assignment, show how to divide it into parts such as the introduction, main body and conclusion, and work on each separately.
- Set a time before the deadline to check on progress.



**Students who appear to be struggling and need help, but are difficult to approach:**

- Continue sharing information about the students' situation with the department office and the DRC, and examine the best way to reach out to the students with a team.

**④ Offer students concrete feedback on their learning.**

One of the best ways you can support students in order to help them improve their outlook and future plan for learning is a comprehensive evaluation of their learning that includes the results of their assignments and exams along with feedback regarding their degree of participation in group activities.

● **Case examples:**

**-How to link struggling students to a support network and facilitate self-directed learning.**

**< Case of a student who cannot attend classes >**

At the end of May, Ms. A, a freshman, had already missed 4 classes of Professor H's course (a small-size required class). Professor H had started to become concerned about her because she had not submitted any assignments and if she missed any more classes, she would fail the course. Professor H decided to contact the department office and asked them to arrange a meeting with Ms. A.

A meeting was held between a staff member, the professor, and the student. Ms. A said that she felt unbearable stress spending all day in a crowded campus and felt like everyone was watching her. She also said that she felt isolated and inferior because she is not good at stating her opinions in group discussions.

At the meeting, the professor and the staff member suggested to facilitate a support network plan for her. The first part of the plan was to introduce an Oritor (a peer supporter for freshmen) to Ms. A as a familiar and everyday advisor. The professor arranged a separate opportunity for Ms. A to e-mail the comments that she could not make in the classroom and for the professor to respond with his feedback. The DRC coordinator (introduced to Ms. A as a regular staff member at the Office of Student Affairs) meets Ms. A occasionally, providing overall student life advice in order to help manage stress, such as finding several quiet spaces on campus to prevent sensory overload.

As a result, Ms. A became stable and completed her class. Now, she has a good outlook for her continuing university life by arranging environments and sources of support suitable for her.

**< Case of a student who cannot keep track of deadlines and time >**

One day, some members of an activity group in a freshman seminar class came to Professor H regarding difficulties with another member of the group, Mr. B. They did not know how to solve the problem with Mr. B, who never took responsibility for his role as a part of their group research project, never showed up for meetings, and often asked the same question about things already explained.

The professor decided to listen to Mr. B's side of the story and discovered that he had a very vague memory of his role in the group and the schedule of the meetings. Mr. B was not only having trouble with forgetfulness when it came to academics, but also with things in his everyday life.

The professor consulted the department office and the DRC in order to deal with this situation. He received advice on how to assist Mr. B by visualizing and organizing information in order to form an effective support strategy. After working with Professor H, Mr. B met the members of his group, apologized and asked everyone to exchange important information, such as dates of meetings and individual responsibilities, through e-mail.

As a result, Mr. B successfully rejoined the group with the cooperation of the other members. Through this opportunity, Mr. B realized that he has difficulty with auditory information processing, and decided to continue learning how to compensate for his weakness with the assistance of the DRC coordinator.

● **Conclusion**  
**-Constructing a Comprehensive Learner-Centered Support System**

Collaboration between all members of the university community, especially faculty, is key to providing appropriate support for all students who face difficulties, including those with developmental disorders. Each department office and the DRC act as the starting point for meaningful student support at Ritsumeikan University. Please do not hesitate to contact us when you recognize struggling students.

**[DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER]**

**[Kinugasa]**

**Location:** The Office of Students Affairs, Student Office(Kenshinkan 1F)  
**Tel:** 075-465-8343 (ext.: 511-8352)  
**Fax:** 075-465-8169  
**Mail:** sns-k@st.ritsumeikan.ac.jp



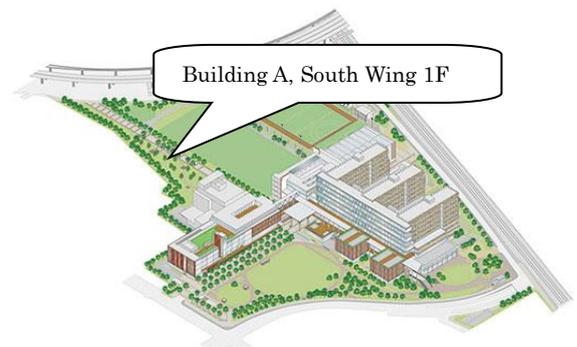
**[BKC]**

**Location:** The Office of Students Affairs, Student Office(Central Ark 1F)  
**Tel:** 077-561-3951 (ext.: 515-2335)  
**Fax:** 077-561-3954  
**Mail:** sns-b@st.ritsumeikan.ac.jp



**[OIC]**

**Location:** The Office of Student Affairs, Student Office (Building A, South Wing 1F)  
**Tel:** 072-665-2130 (ext.: 513-2402)  
**Fax:** 072-665-2139  
**Mail:** sns-oic@st.ritsumeikan.ac.jp



**[Suzaku]**

★Please contact at **[Kinugasa]** campus.

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● **Reference 1 “Checklist for classroom recognition of struggling students”**

The following list contains some of the overt problems of struggling students reported to the department office or the DRC in the past. Faculty insight regarding the reasons behind these behaviors and the reporting of such instances are important steps toward initiating a support network.

- Continuous absence or poor attendance
- Chronic lateness
- Failure to submit assignments or a particular type of assignment, such as a report
- Tendency to be easily distracted and/or restless
- Repeating the same errors regardless of continual instruction, showing no improvement
- Missing only testing dates, despite attending all other classes.
- Noticeably poor content of report assignments (e.g., far fewer words or sentences than expected, simply listing the facts but not synthesizing or conceptualizing, or writing comments totally out of context)
- Students asking for help regarding their learning or student life.
- Receiving a complaint from students regarding another student’s behavior, such as breaking promises or being uncooperative

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● **Reference 2 Ritsumeikan Support Policy to Students with Disabilities**

The United Nation’s “*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*” adopted in 2006 and signed by the Japanese Government in 2007, elaborates on the concept of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities and serves as a basic framework for support. The Ritsumeikan Support Policy for Students with Disabilities is based on “*The Japanese Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination*” and “*The Guideline to Accelerate Elimination of Discrimination on the Basis of Disabilities in Educational Spheres*” (manifested by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – Japan). Following the above, Ritsumeikan will evaluate and provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities, reflecting the characteristics of each student’s needs and area of study.

Source: <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/file.jsp?id=243806>

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● **Reference 3 Resources**

- 1) Ritsumeikan Disability Resource Center  
<http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/drc/english>
- 2) Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) “Tips to support students with disabilities”  
[http://www.jasso.go.jp/gakusei/tokubetsu\\_shien/guide\\_kyouzai/guide/index.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/gakusei/tokubetsu_shien/guide_kyouzai/guide/index.html)
- 3) Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) “Annual Report of students with disabilities at higher educational institutes”  
[http://www.jasso.go.jp/gakusei/tokubetsu\\_shien/chosa\\_kenkyu/chosa/index.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/gakusei/tokubetsu_shien/chosa_kenkyu/chosa/index.html)