



Vocational College
SPESIA



Special Support Toolkit for Workplace

Digital version of the guide

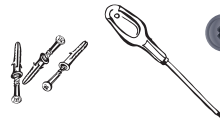
Hello, workplace supervisor!

Here are some tools for supporting and supervising students who need special support in the workplace, feel free to use them.



The special support toolkit

- gives you more confidence for supervising students
- tells you what you should remember and do at different stages of the working life period
- helps you understand why certain things might be challenging for the student
- helps you solve difficult situations
- makes your work smoother.



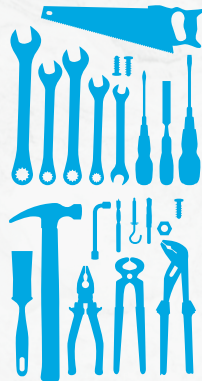
Wins and challenges in supervising students

The workplace supervisor is an important person in training the student to become a professional. Student supervision is rewarding and educational for both parties, but it is not without its challenges.

Do you ever feel like something is not working and you don't really know what to do with your student? Maybe your student would need special support, but you didn't receive the instructions?

No worries, here is a toolkit for you! If you want to make different learners understand, motivate them and help them function as well as possible, read our tips below.

TIP: Check out our free workplace supervisor training!



Need for special support is not an obstacle to success in working life

As people, we are all different. We have different strengths and challenges. Sometimes, we need a little more support to learn or accomplish something, and in the context of institutions, this is called **special support**.

It is important to be aware that the need for special support does not mean poor performance at work, simply taking certain matters into account or approaching them differently.

When a person is in a job that matches their abilities in terms of difficulty and workload and receives the right kind of support, they can perform their duties excellently.

Special support needs can be related to a number of issues, such as:

- perception
- executive functions
- neuropsychiatric properties
- physical limitations
- sensory defensiveness
- mental health
- fear of social situations
- emotional regulation or attentiveness.



Forms of support in vocational training

All vocational training includes learning in the workplace.

Special support refers to individual arrangements that can be made in all secondary institutions.

Demanding special support is more diverse and comprehensive support, which is mainly available in the six Finnish vocational special education institutions: individual solutions and guidance, small group sizes, learning by doing and support during working life periods.



Vocational education and training includes:

- Preparatory education and training
- Initial vocational qualifications
- Further vocational qualifications
- Specialist vocational qualifications

Special support is available in all vocational education and training, with the exception of TELMA training that prepares the student for work and independent living and that always features demanding special support. On the other hand, anything other than further vocational qualifications or specialist vocational qualifications can be provided as demanding special support.

Special and demanding special support in the workplace

Special support

- individual guidance
- different tasks according to skills
- personal planning for the practicing of tasks
- support and guidance from the educational institution to the workplace, if necessary

Demanding special support

- working with a partner or in a team
- sufficient number of repetitions in tasks
- practical tasks, one task at a time
- written and visual instructions and scheduling
- support and guidance from the educational institution to the workplace

Did you know?

Special support or demanding special support does not always mean a diagnosis, disability or visible differences, but the need for support in studies.

Different education and training, different skills

Education leading to a qualification

If the student studies for a vocational qualification, their training is guided by the vocational competence requirements. Even if their assessment is adapted or the requirements are deviated from (*see next page*), the aim of their studies is to acquire the competence needed in the sector. The student demonstrates their competence in a competence demonstration.

Preparatory education and training

There are two types of preparatory education and training: TUVA, which prepares students for education leading to a qualification, and TELMA, which prepares students for work and independent life. Both of these include learning in the workplace. However, they do not include competence demonstrations.

→ **TUVA training** is provided by both ordinary vocational institutions and special education institutions. The TUVA training is intended for students who are able to complete a qualification and work in the profession in question. TUVA provides support for career selection, as well as skills for studying and becoming independent.

→ **TELMA training** is always demanding special support training. TELMA training prepares students for work and independent life. It does not lead to a qualification, but builds an individual study and employment path for the student. TELMA is about practising everyday skills, strengthening the ability to function and preparing the student for working life.

Where to set the bar? Assessment and certificates

In initial vocational qualification training (*not further or specialist vocational training*), the competence assessment can be adapted or exceptions made to the vocational competence requirements or to key competence requirements, as necessary. Adaptions and exceptions must be visible in the certificate.

Adaptation = the student does not achieve the T1 level of competence despite the pedagogical support measures.

The assessment is based on adapted, separately defined, individual criteria.

Exception = if a vocational competence requirement is unreasonable for the student due to their previous educational background, disability or illness.

Assessment scales

- Initial vocational qualifications: T1–K5
- Adapted: M1–M5, including verbal assessment
- further vocational and specialist vocational qualifications and preparatory education and training: pass/fail

Qualification certificate = The student receives the same qualification certificate, regardless of the level of support.

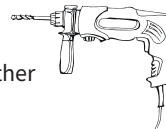
Competence certificate = If the student does not achieve the key qualification competence, they receive a certificate of competence.



PHASES OF THE WORKING LIFE PERIOD

What can you do to make the period successful?

- Advance planning and preparation make everything smoother
- Getting to know the space and people is encouraging
- Splitting tasks and clear instructions make work easier
- Encouragement strengthens the ability to follow plans and work towards the goal
- Inclusion in the work community strengthens working life skills
- Immediate and regular feedback supports learning



Before the working life period

- ☐ Review the tasks in which the student can acquire competence together with the institution's representative (*teacher, supervisor*).
- ☐ Find out what support the student needs and what are their strengths.
 - Encourage the student to talk about their support needs. The topic may be sensitive for the student.
 - Make a plan that specifies the tasks, the amount of support required and the forms of support.
 - Based on the student's information, identify suitable tasks that the student is able to perform independently.
 - Also identify the tasks for which the student needs support. Consider whether you can arrange the support.
- ☐ A training or apprenticeship contract is concluded for the working life period. The need for support and its forms are specified in an appendix to the agreement.
- ☐ Find out what to do in potentially challenging situations. Exchange the necessary contact details.
- ☐ Familiarise yourself with the tasks involved in the assessment.

At the beginning of the working life period

- ☐ Inform other staff of the student.
- ☐ Meet the student as agreed and introduce the company's facilities and staff.
- ☐ Review the rules and practices of the work community, such as working hours, breaks and other practical matters.
- If necessary, use appropriate induction training methods, the institution's representative can give you more information on these.
- ☐ Ensure that the student has understood the rules and practices.
- Do not assume that the student remembers everything after the first time, be prepared to repeat the instructions.
- Be available or ensure that the student always has the opportunity to receive guidance and support.
- Note: for the student, all details and the environment are new, they are here to learn and not a professional employee in the field.

During the working life period

- Give instructions clearly and carefully. Make sure the student understands the instructions.
- Provide instructions in small parts and also divide more complex task into parts.
- Be prepared for repetition and confirmation questions even if you have gone through the practices several times.
- ☐ Provide the student with constructive feedback on the development of their competence throughout the working life period and the opportunity to develop their skills on the basis of the feedback. Feedback related to competence development should be distinguished from feedback related to the completion of a qualification.
- ☐ If the tasks or situations change, be prepared to adjust the practices and support measures.

During the working life period

- ☐ Stay calm and create a safe environment in which the student feels accepted and dares to ask and admit their insecurity.
- ☐ Encourage the student to self-assessment and professional discussion on a daily basis.
- ☐ Remember that the student's social skills may be linked to their need for special support.
- Encourage shy students. Many would like to participate more in social situations than their skills permit.
- If a student is overenthusiastic, let them know when it is appropriate to talk to colleagues or customers and when it is not.
- ☐ Contact the institution immediately if you are concerned about something or notice anything abnormal in the student's behaviour or activities. Sometimes even the smallest observation from the point of view of the workplace can be meaningful in a student's life.

The student works normally during the competence demonstration

What is a competence demonstration?

During the competence demonstration, the student demonstrates their competence by performing practical tasks at the workplace. The qualification criteria define the vocational skills and competencies the student must demonstrate. The duration of the demonstration varies by student.

What needs to be taken into account?

One qualification unit can include one or more demonstrations, during which the student demonstrates their competence. The competence demonstration can be continued in another workplace to ensure sufficient coverage. Demonstration of vocational skills and competence is planned individually together with the student.

Competence demonstration of a special support student

The competence demonstration of students who need support is typically planned and practised more, which makes the student more confident in themselves and their own work. The demonstration can involve more supervision or working in teams. This has an impact on the assessment, which may also be adapted. The teacher will provide instructions to the workplace supervisor.

Assess the student's competence in the assessment discussion together with the teacher

- Assess the competence acquired by the student.
- Make an assessment decision. The teacher is responsible for documenting the decision.
- Share the assessment decision and its reasoning with the student.
- If the working life period does not include a competence demonstration, hold a feedback discussion with the teacher at the end of the period and provide the student with the feedback.
- **After each period, respond to the national Working Life Feedback Survey, which you will receive by e-mail after the end of the period. The survey has an impact on the performance-based funding the educational institution receives.**

The assessors decide on the assessment of competence in the assessment discussion.

SPESIA EXPERT SERVICES



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This product is a toolkit compiled by Spesia Expert Services for professional supervisors in educational institutions and workplaces.

We are an expert organisation for special education and special support. We provide services and training for the daily teaching and supervision tasks. Let's find together solutions that make your work easier.

Thank you for supervising students

Ordering the toolkit (FI):

verkkokauppa.spesia.fi/tyokalupakki



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Special successes arises
from special challenges

General instructions for supervising a student who needs special support

See the videos, tips and background information in the digital guide.



spesia.fi/työpaikkaohjaajalle

- ✓ Communicate and interact in a clear manner.
- ✓ Provide relevant information about the premises and workplace practices.
- ✓ Ensure that the student has understood the tasks and working hours.
- ✓ Divide the tasks into smaller parts and provide instructions for one step at a time.
- ✓ Schedule the tasks and arrange clear and sufficient breaks.
- ✓ If necessary, use visual instructions, models and diagrams.
- ✓ Use lists and reminders to make it easier to remember.
- ✓ Remember that the support and openness of the work community plays an important role!

Perception difficulties

The brain processes perceived information exceptionally. The person may have difficulties, for example, in perceiving spatial relationships, directions or parts of an entity.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Difficulties in finding one's way, moving, drawing conclusions or act quickly in changing situations, also difficulties related to the passing of time.

Tools

- plitting tasks and instructions into smaller parts
- Written and sometimes visual instructions
- Scheduling and clear structure of tasks



“At first, I couldn’t find my way from the dressing room to the workstation in the big workplace, but I learned.”

Sensory defensiveness, hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity

Various sensory stimuli, such as lights, sounds, smells, tastes and colours may feel disturbingly intense to some people. The sense of touch can also be particularly strong, making it difficult to find suitable clothing, for example.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Loud noises, bright lighting or unpleasant work clothing can be very uncomfortable and cause difficulties in concentrating. Continuous exposure to stimuli is stressful and tiresome.

Tools

- Possibility to protect oneself against disturbing sensory stimuli
- Fitting and comfortable work clothes
- Sufficient breaks in a peaceful environment

*"The work clothes
felt uncomfortable
and disturbed my
concentration.*

*It got better when
I was allowed to
choose my clothes."*

Physical limitations


Persons with reduced mobility need various aids, such as an electric wheelchair, a rewinding wheelchair, a walker or walking poles, for example. In addition, the person may have sensory disabilities, allergies, shortness or multiple disabilities. Less obvious limitations include, for example, weak compression force or pain.

Miten voi ilmetä työpaikalla?

Fyysinen rajoite voi hankaloittaa tai estää työtehtäviä, jotka edellyttävät kantamista, nostamista, asentojen vaihtamista tai ovat muuten fyysisesti haasteellisia.

Tools

- General accessibility, i.e. small level differences, easy passageways, spacious lifts, sufficiently wide doorways, light doors, usable equipment and proper maintenance of the premises
- Removal of physical obstacles, such as removing unnecessary furniture from access routes
- Finetuning, such as a ramp on the workroom threshold or a lower workstation



"When someone asks why I have a wheelchair even though I can walk, I ask them why they have a car when they might as well walk. I cannot walk very far or very fast"

Mental health disorders


Mental health disorder is a generic term for a variety of psychiatric disorders. Mental health disorders are classified according to their severity and symptoms. The most common mental health disorders in students are depression and anxiety disorders.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Difficulties in concentration and memory and lack of initiative are typical, so the work does not always proceed as planned. Reduced tolerance to stress can make the student irritated and hurt easily, and their ability to receive negative feedback is low. Withdrawal and low levels of social interaction are common. The student might not show up.

Tools

- Discussing working methods together with the student (*see Difficulties with executive functions*)
- A peaceful and safe atmosphere where everyone can be themselves and are allowed to fail.
- Listening and understanding and asking small questions every now and then: “How are you doing?”



“It is hard to stay active, but the good atmosphere of the workplace really helps.”

Fear of social situations

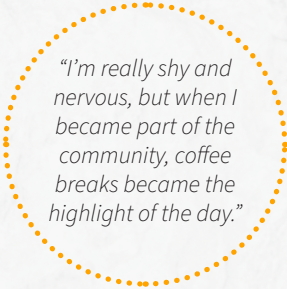
The fear of social situations is related to the ability to work in the community and at the workplace. The person is afraid that others think they are stupid, weak or crazy, and therefore avoids situations where they fear that others will notice their symptoms of anxiety. This fear increases anxiety in many people suffering from mental disorders.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Evasive behaviour. Prefers to stay in tasks that they are sure they know how to perform. Easily interprets feedback as judgment. A strong fear of being judged negatively or that their own behaviour will lead to humiliating situations. Unreasonable self-criticism and understatement of own skills.

Tools

- Encouraging and welcoming to take part in social interaction without pressure
- A safe atmosphere where failure is also allowed
- Encouraging feedback and discussing working methods together with the student



"I'm really shy and nervous, but when I became part of the community, coffee breaks became the highlight of the day."

Neuropsychiatric disorders are common

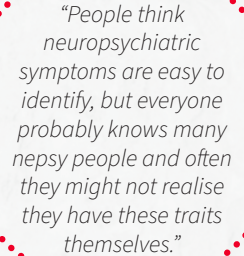
Nepsy = traits of neuropsychiatric disorders (*can also refer to the person*)

Nentti = normal neuropsychiatric properties (*usually refers to a person*)

Neuropsychiatric syndromes include the autism spectrum, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Tourette's syndrome. They are caused by developmental, structural and/or functional anomalies in the brain. Sometimes, neuropsychiatric symptoms can be related to a challenging family situation, an irregular lifestyle or trauma.

Neuropsychiatric traits are individual, and they manifest themselves as behaviors and practices that are specific to each person. These special features are evident in social interaction, communication, recognising and regulating one's emotions, self-direction and sensory functions.

All syndromes have their own challenges, but also many strengths, such as perseverance, precision, creativity or ingenuity.



"People think neuropsychiatric symptoms are easy to identify, but everyone probably knows many nepsy people and often they might not realise they have these traits themselves."

Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder ADHD

ADHD manifests itself as inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and/or impulsiveness. Inattention can mean forgetfulness, proneness to errors or difficulties in organising tasks. Hyperactivity can be manifested as frequent movement or constant activity. Impulsivity can mean, for example, being chatty, having difficulties waiting for one's turn or acting on an impulse.

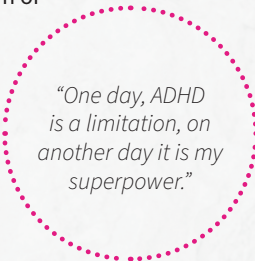
How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

ADHD can manifest itself as sensitivity to disruptions or as difficulties in remembering instructions. The student may work really quickly or concentrate on a single task excessively.

Problems with planning, prioritising, scheduling and starting are common. On the other hand, the student's energy, creativity and enthusiasm can be a treasure in the work community.

Tools

- Clear framework: working hours, breaks, quiet workstation, clear tasks and routines
- Dividing instructions into smaller parts, visual work instructions, calendar, reminders and work lists
- Varied tasks and fast-paced work help to maintain attention



*"One day, ADHD
is a limitation, on
another day it is my
superpower."*

Autism spectrum


Autism spectrum disorder is a neurobiological developmental disorder in which the brain functions differently, affecting the way the person communicates, acts, senses their environment and interacts. The range of symptoms is individual and varies in severity.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Students on the autism spectrum may appear confused at first, as new people, places, sensory stimuli, situations and tasks increase their anxiety and concentration problems. Working as part of the community, discussing and asking for help may seem difficult at first. Sensitivity to change and stress, as well as a tendency to take things literally, make flexible operations difficult.

Tools

- These students benefit from anticipation, clarity and visualisation.
- Provide clear instructions on what, where, when and with whom something is happening or being done
- When the working environment and communication are clear, the student's good qualities as a committed, thorough and accurate employee come through



"As a person on the autism spectrum, I have three wishes for the workplace: planning, planning and planning."

Difficulties with executive functions

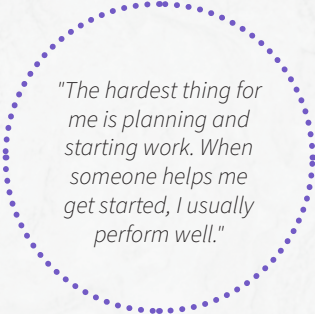
Difficulties with executive functions mean the inability to make plans, change them and complete planned tasks. Challenges with time management, scheduling and information structuring are typical, as are difficulties in preventing disruptive impulses.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

The person may have difficulties in organising and prioritising work and the use of time, in particular, when starting and completing tasks. Due to difficulties in concentrating and directing attention, their activity is easily disturbed or the person may take up and concentrate on irrelevant tasks.

Tools

- Clear instructions, followed by a check-up question: "What do you need to do now?"
- Visual instructions and reminders, voice reminders to help with time management
- Working alongside others, not working alone for too long periods



"The hardest thing for me is planning and starting work. When someone helps me get started, I usually perform well."

Attention deficit disorder

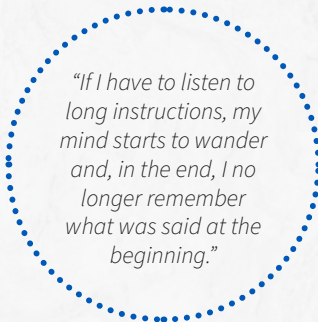
Attention deficit disorders (ADHD, ADD) mean difficulties in directing, maintaining and switching attention from one object to another. Challenges in learning and social relations are also a common symptom.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Difficulties in planning and organising one's own work, starting new tasks and using feedback. Concentrating, following instructions and working on challenging tasks can be difficult. Distraction and forgetfulness are common.

Tools

- Scheduling tasks and dividing them into smaller parts
- Clear routines, consistent guidelines, avoidance of unnecessary interruptions
- Concrete feedback immediately after successful work
- Having a clear workspace and minimising stimuli in the environment, where possible



"If I have to listen to long instructions, my mind starts to wander and, in the end, I no longer remember what was said at the beginning."

Challenges with emotional regulation

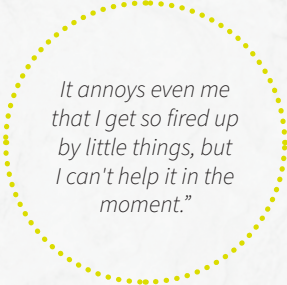
Challenges with emotional regulation affect several areas of life. Actions are impulsive and guided by emotions, and little thought is given to the consequences. Emotions ignite quickly and turn into action and words before the person has time to think about it.

How can this manifest itself in the workplace?

Regulation problems can manifest themselves as impulsiveness, frustration and aggression. Interaction problems are also common. When people are tired or hungry, emotions can escalate more easily.

Tools

- Stay calm and be ready to listen and talk
- Be empathetic and try to see things from the student's perspective
- Express what you see and hear in words and show the student that you want to understand and help



*It annoys even me
that I get so fired up
by little things, but
I can't help it in the
moment."*

Sources and further information



ameo.fi/front-page | Vocational special education institutions

eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en | Qualification requirements & Competence demonstrations and competence assessment

hahku.fi | Information and exercises for perception skills rehabilitation, Hahmola

mielenterveystalo.fi/en | Information, self-care programmes and guides

ohjaan.fi/en/home | Tools workplace tutoring

oph.fi/en | Finnish National Agency for Education, information on education and learning in working life

spesia.fi | Spesia's Expert services & Working life services

vates.fi/en/vates-2.html | Support for equal employment



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*The material was produced
within the Yhdessä parasta
Länsi project*