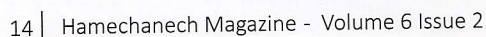


*By Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum*





The time had come. A combination of a high prescription and cataracts in both eyes prompted me to make the decision to have the cataracts removed. As I apprehensively drove up to the huge eye clinic to meet the ophthalmologist who would do the surgery, I had no idea of the *chinuch* lessons that awaited me inside.

The receptionist told me to have a seat “right” on the other side of the wall in the “blue chairs.” On the other side of the wall, there was a large waiting room. I obediently sat down in one of the chairs “right” next to the wall. I have to admit that I am somewhat colorblind, but blue is a color that I can see. The multi-shaded chair that I was sitting in did not seem to be exactly blue, but it was close enough. After all, I reasoned that the yellowish cataract also distorted my perception of color. It was a bit unsettling that the plaque of doctors’ names that was on the wall in front of me did not list my doctor, but I knew I was okay since I was sitting in the “blue chairs.”

After a while, I was surprised to hear my name called out from the other side of the large room. The technician asked me why I was sitting in the “green chairs?” After my appointment, I again entered into the large waiting room. I then noticed that over each set of different colored chairs there was a colored sign hanging from the ceiling with the corresponding color written on it. After these events, I felt somewhat foolish and embarrassed.

The eye clinic obviously put thought into the clinic’s design and operation. The receptionist gave me clear instructions; there were color-coded chairs, written signs, and plaques that listed the names of the doctors. Nevertheless, I ended up in the wrong place. As a special education instructor, I am sometimes involved in the design of adapted and modified programs for children with special needs. My visit to the ophthalmologist taught me many lessons about modification design that I had not previously appreciated:

- Make sure that the modifications are helpful to the student (colors do not help a person who is color-blind).
- Students need to be made aware of the tools that are available to them. Do not assume that they will notice the signs

that are hanging from the ceiling (or the assignment that is written on the board!).

- People who are going to eye surgeons have visual issues and they therefore require extra help. The eye clinic actually employed multiple means to help direct patients to the correct place. Children with special needs often require multiple adaptations/modifications. Careful assessment is also needed in order to determine if these adaptations/modifications are sufficient or if even more needs to be done

- It is necessary to be careful in the words that are used to give instructions. “Right on the other side of the wall” can mean several things: “next to it”, “anywhere on the other side”, or “to the right” (as opposed to left).

- It is important to check that children with special needs understand the instructions.

Another thing that I realized was the sense of uncertainty and embarrassment that children with special needs often experience. Although I was not sure that I was sitting in a blue chair, I rationalized that I must be in the right place. I felt more uncertain when I did not notice my doctor’s name, but I still rationalized that I was right. I felt embarrassed when I was questioned about why I was sitting in the green chairs and I felt utterly stupid when I later noticed the signs hanging from the ceiling. Is it any wonder that children who experience these types of events on a daily basis will manifest all types of academic, emotional, and behavioral issues?

Mechanchim can do many things in their classrooms to help children with special needs and to reduce the anxiety and embarrassment that these students often experience. When proper adaptations/modifications are made for students, much of the anxiety, confusion and embarrassment that they experience will be alleviated. The following is a partial list of adaptations/modifications that can make it easier for children with special needs to take tests and prepare worksheets:

- Tests should be typewritten.
- Make tests visually uncluttered by leaving space between items.
- On multiple-choice tests, align the answers vertically.
- Provide spacing in between different types of questions. Provide

separate directions and a sample item for each type of question.

- Leave enough room to answer short-answer or essay questions (without having to continue on the back or next page).

- For students who have difficulty with multiple-choice questions, reduce the number of possible answers.

- For students who read slowly or who have organizational problems, avoid long matching lists. Keep lists to five items and group by concepts. Also, avoid questions that require the student to draw lines to the correct answer.

- Students with recall memory weaknesses will do better on a multiple-choice test than on a fill-in-the-blank test.

- Allow oral or dictated answers.
- Color-code, underline, or highlight key words.

- Allow extra time.

- Read the questions to the student.

- Orally explain the directions. Have the student repeat back the directions.

- Short break during the test.

- Provide the student with study guide before the test (or an actual copy of the test when appropriate).

- Alternate testing site.

- Alternative grading scale.

- Test on smaller sections or make student responsible for only part of the material.

Mechanchim have the ability to empower students with special needs to succeed on tests. With careful test-design, a mechanech can affect the student with special needs in a significant way. Bezras Hashem, adaptations/modifications that mechanchim can use during classroom instruction will be discussed in future articles. **H**

*Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum, a regularly featured Hamechanech columnist, directs the Limudei Kodesh Resource Room in The Scranton Hebrew Day School and he runs the Online Resource Room. He is also the coauthor of The List Chumash teachers manual and Hamaftach L’Chumash workbook series. He can be contacted at (570)342-7998 or [ryathelist@gmail.com](mailto:ryathelist@gmail.com).*