Have you been asked to co-teach this year? Are you unsure of how to manage a classroom with two adults? The following information will outline four basic strategies necessary to ensure a good year for everyone.

**Strategy 1: Sweat the Small Stuff**
You will need to *sweat the small stuff* for the co-teaching partnership to start off well and to run smoothly throughout the year. It is important to discuss the things that seem routine or mundane. It’s these very items that, if left unattended, will ruin your partnership, causing frustration and resentment.

The two of you need to discuss the classroom discipline policy and its implementation. You will also need to focus on grading and planning, classwork and homework, materials, and student modifications and accommodations, as well as noise level tolerance, giving and receiving feedback, and instructional strategies.

The classroom now belongs to you both, as well as all your students. To become a safe learning environment for everyone, the *small stuff* must be discussed, decided, and implemented.

**Strategy 2: We Are Family**
Taking the time to build a relationship with your co-teacher is an important step towards being a successful team. Co-teaching is a collaborative relationship that depends on parity, shared goals and responsibilities, shared accountability for student outcomes, and joint decision making. To be an effective team you must also establish good communication skills, be flexible, and learn to trust and respect each other. These pieces do not fall into place overnight and they require time and dedication to the process.

Another difficult piece for many teachers entering into a co-teaching partnership is the ability to give up control. As teachers it is necessary for us to be in control of kids, curriculum, instruction, etc. However, when another adult is added to the classroom full control is no longer an option. The environment needs to change from mine, mine, mine to ours, ours, ours. It is within this family environment that students as well as teachers begin to feel that the classroom is a safe place, one where everybody is welcome and everyone can take the chances needed to learn and grow.

**Strategy 3: Divide and Conquer**
Enhanced instruction and positive student outcomes are clearly goals of the co-taught classroom. Having two teachers in the classroom, both with important but different areas of strength, benefits all students not just those receiving special education services. The general educator brings a wealth of knowledge about the curriculum that needs to be taught, while the special educator brings a strong background in the learning strategies that assist everyone.

When there are two teachers in the classroom, instruction should look very different than when there is only one. With two teachers we are able to raise the level of engagement and instructional intensity. To do this Marilyn Friend (Friend & Cook, 2007) has identified six approaches to co-teaching. These approaches are identified as One Teach/One Assist, One Teach/One Observe, Station Teaching, Parallel Teaching, Alternative Teaching, and Team Teaching or more simply put, divide and conquer.

The co-teaching approaches allow us to divide students in ways that better meet their needs and enhance learning. By implementing these instructional models we can increase student interest, assess understanding, raise student involvement, provide a safe small group environment, encourage risk taking, and ensure learning. In a true co-taught classroom both teachers are used to divide students, instruction, and tasks needed to conquer the learning challenges of today.

**Strategy 4: To Be or Not To Be?**
When the question is about planning,
the answer is always To Be. Planning for the co-taught classroom is always a difficult task. Everyone is busy; it is easy to let other responsibilities of work or home get in the way. However, the success of the co-taught classroom depends heavily on the planning involved. To put in place all that is discussed in this article, planning is critically important. Planning can involve macro-planning sessions before the school year starts or on workdays. During these sessions a unit of study is outlined so that both teachers understand the direction the class is going. Micro-planning sessions are shorter, with a more narrow focus. These sessions can take place weekly for an allotted amount of time or even on the fly when teachers have been co-teaching together longer and are more familiar with the curriculum. When planning for the co-taught classroom assign roles and responsibilities, establish the co-teaching models that will be used, and address the accommodations and/or modifications that will have to be made to meet the needs of the students. It is difficult to emphasize how important co-planning is to the success co-teaching. It is during this co-planning time that relationships are built, trust is established, responsibilities are assigned, and communication is practiced. Co-planning is a difficult thing to commit to and one of the most important aspects for successful co-teaching. So, the strategies are in place, the students are walking through the door, and it is going to be a great year...let the race begin!

**Resources:**
