



Helping Students with Brain Injury

Impairments in sustaining attention and concentration are among the most common changes in cognitive functioning following a brain injury. They range from the inability to attend to a specific task for more than a few minutes to more prolonged difficulties, such as concentrating during a lecture. These problems disrupt academic functioning and may warrant individualized teaching and/or “cognitive breaks” during the day. If attention and/or concentration difficulties existed before the injury, they are likely to be more pronounced after the injury.

The following are sample strategies you can use. It is important to remember that all brain injuries are unique and that all students have different strengths and weaknesses, therefore different strategies may or may not work depending on the student, the class, and the time of day, among other factors. It is important to remain flexible in trying different strategies until you find one that works for that student, and to always keep in mind the ultimate goal of moving students towards independence. Once you have found a strategy that works use it consistently and share it with others who work with that student.

| Difficulty with... | Strategy/Accommodation | Example |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Following directions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Modifying info; breaking down tasks ➤ Subtle cueing ➤ Using enlarged work ➤ Stressing important information | <p>Dave has difficulty with the verbal directions given prior to test taking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dave is provided written step by step directions with his test. ➤ The teacher checks 5 minutes into the test on how Dave is doing and points to a direction he missed. ➤ Dave is provided the math test, and rather than 20 questions on page 1 there are four enlarged questions on page 1. ➤ Dave is provided an outline highlighting the four main points of the chapter. |
| Talking out of turn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Positive reinforcement for on task behavior and turn taking | <p>Sue blurts out the answer to the teacher’s question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher praises Sue for raising her hand before asking a question. |
| Tuning out distractions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reducing visual and auditory distractions | <p>Carl is looking out the window at the gym class outside instead of focusing on his teacher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Carl is seated at the desk in front of the teacher to reduce distraction. |
| Completing a classroom assignment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Helping the student focus through routine. | <p>Lisa missed parts of the teacher’s instructions and completed her mid-term report incorrectly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lisa’s language arts class always follows the same |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Shortened work ➤ Testing accommodations ➤ Provide structure so the student can get started on the assignment | <p>format: 10 minutes of lecture, 10 minutes of guided reading, 10 minutes of practice, 10 minutes of wrap up activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lisa's science test has 5 questions that test her overall knowledge of the subject rather than 20. ➤ Lisa is allowed extended time and test taking in a separate room. ➤ Lisa' |
| <p>Switching from one activity to another</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Display visual transition cues | <p>Bob is still focused on the chapter summary while the class has moved on to lab work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bob has his schedule taped to his desk to reference throughout the day. |
| <p>Being able to filter out and ignore background noise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reducing visual and auditory distractions | <p>Nancy is easily distracted by students working in small groups within the classroom. She is unable to focus and work with her group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nancy is seated at the desk in front of the teacher to reduce distraction. |
| <p>Neurofatigue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Building in breaks | <p>Bobby's attention and concentration wanes later in the day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bobby has rest breaks built into his day, especially after very challenging classes. As he demonstrates improved stamina, the breaks will be reduced. |

Adapting the strategies for the IEP

The IEP focuses on academic and/or functional areas affected in the school setting, with the goal of establishing measurable academic and/or functional goals. These goals include benchmark or short-term objectives, as well as criteria for measuring and evaluating the objective. It also includes modifications and supplementary aids, including assistive technology devices and services. As there have been numerous advancements in technology in recent years an assistive technology evaluation should be a consideration for all areas of impairment, including physical and cognitive impairments. *It is important to keep in mind that the IEP should be a fluid document, re-assessed regularly and able to be modified if strategies being utilized are not having the desired effect.*

Example:

Academic and/or Functional Area: Attention/Concentration

Annual Measurable Academic and/or Functional Goal: Attends to auditory instruction for 10 minutes by June 15.*



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Benchmark or Short-Term Objectives: Attends to auditory instruction for 5 minutes (looking at teacher, remaining in seat) by November 30.

Criteria: Teacher and teacher aide assessment.

Evaluation: 3 out of 5 trials/observations.

Modification/Supplementary Aid: PowerPoint and/or teacher lecture notes ahead of time.

*Other areas of attention could also include attention to computer based tasks, written assignments, reading assignments, etc.

Academic and/or Functional Area: _____

Annual Measurable Academic and/or Functional Goal: _____

Benchmark or Short-Term Objectives: _____

Criteria: _____

Evaluation: _____

Modification/Supplementary Aid: _____



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“Helping Students with Brain Injury” is a series developed by the Children & Adolescents Committee of the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey. To view additional sheets in the series, visit www.bianj.org/helping-students-with-brain-injury.