

Organising yourself and your belongings

Ages 5-11

Children with difficulties organising themselves generally have difficulties with sequencing actions and the order of tasks. They may find it challenging to plan their time, knowing what follows what, how long things will take and what is needed for a task e.g. the child who brings the wrong folder to class, who always misplaces items and who has difficulty starting or completing an activity.

The following are ideas and strategies to assist in developing compensatory techniques for the child.

By no means will this contain all the answers, but at least it may give you a place to start.

Suggested strategies

Individual workspace:

- Keep only necessary items on desk top
- Let the child use a clipboard or large bulldog clips to keep paper together
- Allow limited number of personal belongings at school
- A see through pencil case can be useful so that the child can easily find pens/pencils etc.

The Environment - home and school

- Have a consistent, designated place/container for each belonging
- Design strategies for organising personal belongings e.g. talk about sorting similar objects etc.
- Label containers, shelves etc. that contain certain items
- Use pictures or lists written on a blackboard to order the day's activities
- Schedule a set time each day to organise belongings

Giving instructions

- Give simple step by step instructions and only the number of steps the child will be able to accomplish
- Use a consistent approach to teaching the child a new skill. Allow time for practice
- Help the child to identify the steps needed to accomplish the task
- Small group working (e.g. 6-8 children per group) and dividing children by using a coding system e.g. number/colour/animal
- Present directions for new activities using the child's best modality for learning (i.e. visual/auditory/multi-sensory)
- Use modelling, demonstration and repetition as necessary prior to the child beginning the task
- Demonstrate or ask another child to model the activity and then ask the child to trial it
- Ask the child to repeat the instructions/directions given and if at all possible, write them down
- Help the child to plan out the task by asking the question: "what materials do you need?" or "What do you do first?"
- Use "fill in the gaps" answers rather than requiring the child to completely set out a piece of work
- Give less homework e.g. Underline the main points to learn if necessary

Time constraints

- Positive reinforcement should be given when the child attempts to complete the task in the time allocated
- It is important that the child understands the expectations of how long a task should take to complete
- The teacher may need to prepare the child for how much time s/he has to clear up before the end of a lesson
- A watch or a beep timer could help your child know when they need to be finishing a piece of work. This could also be used as a warning that the task is about to end.
- Give realistic time frames to allow the child to organise themselves before the task commences. It may be worthwhile changing the emphasis on the time taken and quality expected (depending on the task)
- If possible allow extra time for task completion

Minimise distractions

- Keep the amount of visual information presented at one time to a minimum
- Choice of position in the classroom may need to be monitored: sitting at the front of the class is less distracting
- Sit away from the window and the door
- Try covering the page so that only 1 or 2 maths problems are exposed at one time
- Have the child use their finger or ruler under a line to help keep their place when reading or doing maths
- Underline or highlight key points
- Keep information on board clear and clutter free

Organising work on a page

Use tactile borders/visual cues i.e. start dots to distinguish lines on a page or the left from the right, and, and where to start writing from

- Write on every second line
- Use a lolly stick/strip of card to indicate distance for leaving a space between words
- Use of worksheets with boxes to be ticked/gaps to be filled in
- Have on show a sample piece of work for the child to refer to
- Mark written work on content not presentation, and give marks for oral responses
- Paper can be taped to the desk at a 45° angle

Movement opportunities

- Give the child opportunities to get up and move around the classroom so that when they need to concentrate they can be more focussed e.g. handing out books and stacking chairs

Transition to secondary school

- Visit the school: a map of the school may be helpful
- Encourage the child to 'adopt a buddy' to assist him/her getting from class to class i.e. a consistent friend of.....
- Encourage the child to focus on various landmarks around the school and make relations between rooms i.e. art is next to woodwork room at top of stairs
- Keep timetable on the wall at home as well as in school bag
- A wipe board fixed to the wall may also be a useful memory guide
- Use of a memory book/diary may help. Encourage writing down or drawing of key things s/he needs to remember
- When having to write a long piece of written work, speaking it aloud and recording it may help to retain ideas
- Use different colours on your timetable to indicate days and subjects. Lamination of the timetable is recommended
- Encourage your child to choose a school bag which has compartments and emphasise the importance of keeping things in the same place for ease of retrieval