

Structured Teaching -Learning new skills using visual prompts

Introduction

We learn new skills through consistent repetition and practice. With time we grow in confidence and are able to do everyday tasks such as tying shoelaces or a tie without thinking about it.

Sometimes children can practice and practice a new skill but struggle to remember it on their own. They may find it difficult remembering the details when washing themselves in the bath, tying shoe laces or may find it hard developing their play skills. Delays in learning can be due to difficulties with communication and understanding, behaviour, organisation or attention.

Structured teaching is a strategy that can be tried when learning is difficult.

What is structured teaching

Structured teaching is a learning style which can be personalised to your child's ability. Pictures, words or lists act as prompts which help children to do tasks on their own.

It teaches children using a consistent approach which is so important for successful learning. The requirements of the task are clearly identified in stages as it is important that both parent and child understand what the task entails.

The prompts act as a support to enable the child to be successful. Some need the stages to be clearly identified to enable them to focus on each component. Others focus on learning the sequence itself.

It can also help a child by allowing them to see how their day, or a part of their day is structured. It helps the child to organise themselves and understand what is coming next, such as a getting ready for school routine for the morning. This often helps to reduce anxiety as a child can see their progress through the day/activity. They can see their less desired activities will come to an end and that their preferred activity will arrive.

How to use it at home

Structured teaching can be used to teach a range of different tasks.

- It can help with developing concentration and working independently, which helps when doing tasks at school or homework.
- It teaches routines such as getting ready for school in the morning, making a simple snack in the kitchen or packing to go swimming.

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- New skills such as getting dressed, learning to tie shoelaces or time management can be taught when the child has the ability to complete each element of the task.
- It can also help to bring order and predictability to the home or school environment when behaviour difficulties are evident.

Making prompts to teach a new skill

Make the prompts with your child to encourage them to get involved. It also helps with their motivation when using them.

Consider the following questions:

- What are you trying to teach?
- How much of the task can your child already do?

It is important to offer enough support to ensure that your child is successful whilst still challenging them to develop their independence. Some may require a step by step guide to complete the task, when others may only need certain parts highlighted which they usually forget.

- What type of prompts to use?

You may wish to use photographs, pictures, key words, sentences or pictures and words. Weekly timetables, a now and next structure or using a mobile phone to store reminders may be appropriate. Times can be added on if these are meaningful to the child. Choose a strategy which your child can get the most from.

Prompts are most effective when kept in the areas they are needed e.g. the bathroom door, kitchen or bedroom.

Here are some examples to consider:

- A sequence of pictures, each cut out & laminated if possible. These can be attached to cardboard or laminated on a strip with Velcro or paperclips. The child removes each picture to place in a 'finished' box as they finish each step. They can be arranged horizontally or vertically.
- A sequence of pictures and an optional word by each picture, which the child follows as a guide (e.g. may be pinned above the sink with a sequence for hand washing or teeth brushing)
- A sequence of pictures with a tick box by each one – this can be laminated or photocopied with a fresh copy each time. The child ticks off, or crosses out each step as they complete it.
- For young people with good reading skills, a written check list can be used. This could have a tick list to the left which can be ticked off as

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each day is complete. Alternatively, items can also be crossed out as completed.

Using a work station

Children who struggle with attention and organisation with homework or with developing play skills can benefit from using a work station. This is a designated space which is used to teach new skills or develop attention.

Introduce this strategy by choosing tasks which your child is familiar with and enjoys. Concentration is easiest when doing something which we enjoy and are familiar with. The work station should be set up with all the tools required to complete the task successfully. Any toys, pencils and crayons for example should be at the table to help with keeping focussed and completing the work.

Ideas of games or activities may be completing a jigsaw, reading a short book or doing a dot to dot. With some tasks you may find using a sand timer or the clock to identify when the task should be completed helps. If your child is not familiar with the task they may need guidance on when the task is completed.

As the child becomes familiar with completing each of the tasks set out you can change the activities to include some tasks which they don't enjoy as much. You can also increase the amount of time a child spends working at the work station.

Many children are distracted by background noise such as the TV or radio. Support your child with making progress by trying to reduce distractions when they are working at their work station.

Behaviour and Daily schedules

Some children who struggle with learning are affected by their anxiety levels. Preparing for learning requires the child to be able to listen and do their best when practicing a new skill. Anxiety levels can affect a child's ability to show their best work and learn new skills.

A daily schedule is a plan of the day including all the activities the child is expected to join in with. It may include going food shopping, PE at school and homework. You may wish to consider the best time of the day to teach your child a new skill if they find some of these tasks difficult to join in with.

Schedules can include a choice or question mark time, to help build flexibility in to the routine – this can be used to show that an activity will come up which has not been decided on yet, or which may change – but will then carry on to follow the structure shown.

Children respond well to being motivated. Clear expectations of the behaviour you do expect should be supported with a reward system to help. Some children respond well to incorporating a favourite character in to their work

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whilst others find an instant reward or collecting points towards a reward is necessary.

Here are some examples of schedules.

Child's name - getting dressed

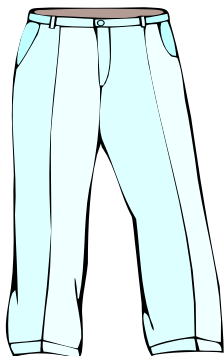
pants



vest



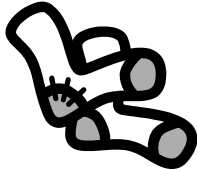
trousers



shirt



socks



jumper



shoes



ready!

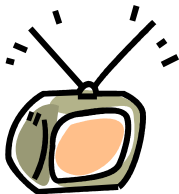


Child's name – bedtime routine

7pm 5 minute tidy up



**7.05 Game boy / TV
Sitting on peanut ball**



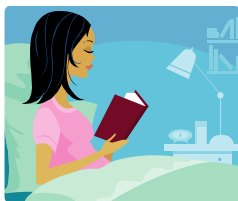
7.15 Get washed & changed



7.30 Drink downstairs



7.45 Story time



8.00 Light out



8.05 Sleep time!



Morning checklist

- Go to toilet.....
- Get off toilet.....
- Time check _____
- Wash hands.....
- Wash face.....
- Wash armpits and put on deodorant.....
- Brush hair.....
- Get dressed.....
- Eat breakfast.....
- Take medicines.....
- Time check _____
- Put watch on.....
- Brush teeth.....
- Come downstairs.....
- Put shoes on.....
- Time check _____
- Put on coat if needed.....

Ready to go!



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Resources:

The following websites include further advice and support to help with using this strategy at home.

www.dotolearn.com

Has advice and examples of visual timetables; offers service to produce customised visual timetables for a fee.

http://www.handsinautism.org/pdf/How_To_Visual_Schedules.pdf

Gives guidance on a variety of schedule types and has some examples ready to print off.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/strategies-and-approaches/visual-supports.aspx>

There is a pdf file on visual supports which gives you a lot of useful information and further links to online resources.