

Academic Accommodations to Minimize Frustration

Description of the problem

Aggressive or confrontational behavior, whether physical or verbal, is disruptive to the daily classroom routine, making it difficult for all to learn, and in the worst cases can cause risks to the health and safety of the student and to others. Uncontrolled behavioral difficulties commonly result in lost opportunities to develop positive relationships with others, and can result in removal from the classroom.

Causes

Students with TBI can be easily frustrated with academic tasks. Many students with brain injury get upset with the perceived disparity between what they could do prior to injury and what they can do after their injury. They also have difficulty with the differences between their abilities and those of their peers. The combination of the neurological effects of brain injury and the feelings of loss and frustration often result in difficulties controlling behavior when under stress, as is the case when academic work is challenging.

Solution

Provide instruction that minimizes errors, which can provoke negative behaviors and interfere with learning. In addition, teach strategies for identifying and managing situations that might result in problems before they emerge.

Strategies

- **Success is key**

Start each activity with a task the student can do successfully.

Example: If you are teaching 2-step multiplication as a new lesson, start the lesson with a review of 1-step multiplication that you know the student has mastered.

- **Break apart tasks**

Break larger tasks into smaller steps to create small successes along the way.

Example: If your student struggles with maintaining focus but needs to take a long test, break the test into sections that you know your student can complete. Put each section on its own piece of paper.

- **Use a systematic process for each task**

It is important that students completely understand what they are being asked to do. Using a systematic process for each task will help your student to complete the task.

- Provide clear examples of what each step of the task will require in order to complete it successfully.
- Model the entire sequence of steps, step-by-step.
- Verbally review the steps with the student and have him/her verbalize each step before beginning.
- Provide specific and meaningful feedback after the student completes each step.
- Ask the student how they thought they did and if they need any help.
- Continually re-evaluate with the student the next set of achievable steps.

Strategies continued

- **Encourage self-monitoring**

For some students, self-monitoring does not come naturally. Support students by scaffolding their self-monitoring.

Example: Try asking one of the following:

- How do you think you are doing?
- What's working or not working for you?
- Is this task easy, difficult or just right?
- When do you think you will need help?

- **Make a plan for help**

Include how everyone will know the student needs help and what exactly help will look like.

Example: If your student needs help frequently, but does not like to draw attention by raising their hand, teach them to place their pencil at the corner of their desk when they need help. You and the student will know the signal, but no one else will.

- **Establish minimum work requirements**

Establish minimum work requirements and steps for achieving goals in collaboration with the student.

Example: Specific time limits, such as "You must complete five problems in 10 minutes" tend to generate oppositional responses. Instead, ask the student, "How many problems do you think you can complete in 10 minutes?" Then re-evaluate this goal and provide positive support.

- **Teach students phrases**

These phrases can be used as escape valves when they feel pressured.

Example: "I need a break" or "I'm starting to feel overwhelmed." Then reward students for using a phrase rather than waiting until they start to lose control.

- **Make use of all available resources**

Counseling, support staff and physical tools such as organizers can help accommodate the student's other brain-injury-related challenges and thereby minimize the frustration and discouragement that frequently get acted out in aggressive ways.

Notes:

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