

Attention

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Attention-related problems are common among students with traumatic brain injuries. Often, students can be disorganized, impulsive, have poor time orientation, and have trouble learning from the consequences of their behavior.

CAUSES

Following a TBI, students frequently report problems with concentration, distractibility, and short attention span. These problems can be directly related to the student's brain injury, either because of damage to the frontal lobes which can result in poor attentional control, or because of widespread brain damage, which can lead to slow inefficient processing.

SOLUTION

Use student training and environmental supports to help students manage their attention so they can benefit from instruction.

STRATEGIES

Provide stable routines

Provide stable routines by creating consistent schedules for classroom activities. Keeping activities at the same time creates a sense of predictability, allowing students to focus on the tasks at hand rather than routine.

- Keep routines brief and easy to remember. For complex routines, provide written or pictured cues for each step.
- Prepare the students for changes in routines.

Example: Since the first day of school Ms. Gordon has been teaching her class the routine for arriving at school. There are four steps that are written on the board outside the classroom.

1. Say good morning to Ms. Gordon.
2. Put your lunch in the bin.
3. Put away your backpack.
4. Start your desk activity. Sam, who has a brain injury, has an individualized desk activity that has been taught to them and reviewed.

Provide specific assignments within larger tasks.

A bigger task can be broken down into smaller assignments which should also have a defined start and end date or a deadline for completion. For tasks that require sustained attention, giving students small tasks to help maintain attention can be useful.

Example: Give the student something specific to listen for in a listening task. For example, in a class read aloud, the student with attention struggles could be asked to listen for the name of the dog in the story. If the task is watching a video, provide written questions ahead of time so the student can follow along.

Provide interesting and engaging classroom activities.

Students learn best when they are interested and engaged in the material being presented. Attention can be maintained by asking the student to draw connections to their own life experiences and situations.

Example: If your lesson plan goal for math period is to have students understand $1/2$, $1/4$, $1/3$ and a whole as fractions explain the concept and then provide students with a hands-on activity in which they manipulate an object into the desired fractions. Let each student make their own real-life connection by asking them to share examples of how fractions are used in their daily lives.

Use redirection strategies

Redirection can range from physically or verbally directing a student back to his desk and restarting the activity to providing a verbal or printed cue. Be careful not to reinforce off-task behavior.

If a student wants (consciously or unconsciously) to escape the task at hand, time out will reinforce the negative behavior.

Example: Tape a printed card that says "focus" to the student's desk. Talk with the student about when, how and why you will use it, then practice. When the student is off task, you can walk over to their desk and point to the card or use a tap on the hand that signals they should read it.

Make a tally sheet the student can tape to their desk. When the student is focused, make a check on a tally sheet---or have the student set a quiet timer and if they are on task when it goes off, they give themselves a tally.

NOTES: