

# Generalization

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

When a child masters a particular skill in one setting it does not necessarily mean that they can use that same skill in a different setting or at a different time. For example, a student may know that when they need to ask a question in math class, they raise their hand and wait to be called on. However, when they are in the library and have a question, they don't transfer this learning and may just sit there not knowing what to do. The transfer of learning (generalization) from one setting to the next is not always automatic for students with brain injuries.

## CAUSES

The parts of the brain that control memory and facilitate transfer of learning are frequently damaged in a TBI. Loss of ability in many areas such as decision-making skills, problem solving, and memory can make generalizing learning very difficult.

## SOLUTION

Incorporate strategies that facilitate transfer of learning (generalization) into everyday teaching.

## STRATEGIES

### Teach skills in multiple settings and situations

If you're trying to teach a student to ask for help before they become frustrated and out of control, work with them when they are doing something difficult in a variety of situations. A respected rule in instruction with students with learning challenges is that new behaviors or skills must be taught in at least three different settings, with at least three different people, and in the context of at least three different activities.

Example: To teach a student to raise their hand in all classes, practice this skill in different classrooms, with different teachers, and at different times throughout the class.

## Have students practice teaching others

Teaching a skill is an excellent way to master it, as many teachers know from experience. Providing ways for students to explain or teach a skill to each other or to family members can facilitate their mastery of it across contexts.

Example: To teach a student to use a homework checklist, allow the student to explain and show the process to you and/or another student. Ask them to do the same with their parent(s) at home.

## Teach students to use a skill

Transfer of learning happens when the student understands when to use the skill. Use many examples highlighting what about a situation requires the skill to be used. The learning should also include situations in which the skill should not be used.

Example: To teach a student the skill of joke telling, practice telling jokes in appropriate situations (lunchtime, breaks, correct audience, etc.), but also practice knowing when not to tell jokes at all (during reading time, tests, etc.) and why.

Example: To teach a high school student to turn in their homework, turning in homework should be practiced in many classes. A volunteer, like the student's special education teacher or a peer, may be willing to walk through this with the student, practicing in every class. The student should understand the expectations and why it is important to turn in their homework.

## Practice skills to fluency or automaticity

Students with cognitive challenges generally require many learning trials to reach fluency. Practice basic skills until they are automatic before moving on to more complex skills. Once the basic skills are automatic, the student will have more success using the skills correctly across all contexts. For example, students can be successful with higher math skills only once basic arithmetic is automatic; reading comprehension will only improve after basic decoding no longer requires conscious effort.

Example: To teach a student two step addition ( $31+11$ ) they must first have fluency with single step addition ( $2+3$ ). Having fluency with single step addition allows them to focus on the new skill of the second step.

# NOTES: