

Organization

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Often, a traumatic brain injury impacts a student's ability to effectively organize many aspects of their life. Students unable to organize their time, material or thoughts struggle to succeed in the classroom.

CAUSES

The frontal lobes of the brain store and process organizational strategies. Strategies mastered before injury may be lost and new strategies can become more difficult to learn. Children who are very young at the time of injury and who have mastered very few strategies often have the hardest time overcoming organizational difficulties, but students of any age can be greatly impacted by organizational deficits.

SOLUTION

Provide a variety of organizational supports to students who need them.

STRATEGIES

Experiment

Be prepared to experiment with different supports. All the supports listed here work for certain people; none of them will work for everyone. Try different supports or combinations of supports until you find one that seems to be helpful, adjusting over time as needed.

Routines and schedules

Time management is difficult and unstructured time can be unproductive because the student may lack the capacity to formulate a plan on his/her own. Utilizing and adhering to a consistent schedule and routine will help minimize the need for students to struggle with creating this themselves as well as alleviate some of the confusion and frustration this would cause.

Example: During unstructured time, give the student 2 choices for how to spend their time. For example, you can say, “You can either read a book or work on your art project. Which would you like to do?” If the student is independently using a written schedule to follow along, you can write the two choices in that time slot.

Models

Students who struggle with organization often have a hard time picturing success. How will they know when they’ve done it correctly? Providing a model for what “finished” looks like can be very helpful.

Example: Provide the student with a sheet of completed math problems, an essay of the proper length and format, or a sample art project before they begin their assignment. Tell them that their assignment will look similar when they are finished.

Ask for help

Teach students to ask for help. Together, decide in advance how they’ll know they need help, how they’ll ask for it, and what kinds of help will be available.

Example: “If you get to a point where you don’t know what to do next or you are confused, raise your hand. I’ll give you a nod so that you know you can put your hand down, and I’ll come and talk it through with you.”

Advanced organizers

Advanced, graphic organizers function as maps to tasks, schedules or thought processes. They can be as simple as a written to-do list and as complicated as a building blueprint. Generally, you want an organizer to be as simple as the task allows and as graphic as the student requires. Very young children or older students with significant disability might require an entirely pictorial organizer. Older children or adolescents can often use written lists, although nearly everyone can benefit from pictures for certain kinds of tasks.

Example: If you are with a student for one class period, you can organize your schedule for that period by time or by activity. If organizing by time, write the time or have a picture of a clock displaying the time with the activity next to it. Include the steps (if needed) to complete

the activity. When it's time to change tasks, say "Look on your schedule and find 10:00. Complete that activity."

If organizing by activity, write the activity-or use a picture of the activity-and include the steps (if needed) to complete the activity. When it's time to move on to the next task, say "Look on your schedule and find the picture of the calculator. Complete that activity."

Rehearsal

Allowing a student with organizational difficulty to practice a complex task before being asked to perform it can be helpful. If certain situations routinely cause anxiety or stress, practicing self-talk scripts can be useful. Nearly any recurring situation can be practiced, which helps students know both what to expect and what is expected of them.

Example: To teach a student how to navigate a large building from one room to another or going from class to class in three minutes through noisy crowded hallways, talk it through or write it down and then practice. First do it with the student when the hallways are empty. Then let the student do it alone, still while empty. Finally, ask the student to do it alone while the halls are full. Talk about how it went.

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