

Occupational Therapy Service for Children and Young People

Increasing Independence Through the Use of Visual Supports

Children often want to become more independent as they get older, however they may struggle to complete daily living tasks from start to finish due to difficulties with:

- Initiating or knowing where to start the task.
- Planning and organizing the task.
- Solving problems throughout the task
- Regulating their emotions such as frustration or excitement, and
- Monitoring their attention and concentration

All of these skills are called “Executive Functions”. When children have difficulties with executive functions, they often need to be supported and taught how to complete tasks explicitly.

Tips to do this:

1. Start by thinking about your child’s strength’s – e.g., a good memory, focuses on small details, has good fine motor skills, likes to help etc.
2. Write a list of tasks which you feel your child might be successful in doing, then sit down with your child to allow them to choose which tasks they would like to learn to do more independently. Involving your child in choosing may increase their motivation to do it.
3. Grade the activity; first show your child how to do the task step by step. Next, let your child help you do it. Then have your child do the task as you supervise. Once your child has mastered it, they’re ready to try it alone! (This may take several days/weeks to achieve!)
4. Use visual supports to support the completion of the task, for example; a visual reminder to do a task, such as a note saying “Don’t forget to feed the dog.”, or, a visual list with a picture of each step to a task, or a tick-box visual board to ensure the task is done in the correct sequence. Examples of visual supports are provided below.
5. Encourage your child to work out what they have forgotten/what went wrong rather than you telling them. They are more likely to remember their mistakes and correct them the next time they try.
6. Try to keep a consistent routine e.g. every Wednesday afternoon your child empties the dishwasher, on a Sunday morning they Hoover their bedroom. Write these on family calendars where your child can see them.

M.A.T.C.H. the Activity to the Child

Modify the task

This involves changing aspects of an activity that are too difficult for the child to perform. The important thing about modifying a task is that the child can still experience success if they make a genuine effort to participate in the activity.

Alter your Expectations

Consider what the ultimate goal of an activity is and then think about where you can be flexible. Allowing extra time or alternate methods of completing a task can make the difference between a lesson learned and an experience of failure for the child.

Teaching Strategies

Many children may require a slightly different teaching approach. Investigate alternate teaching strategies which may be helpful for your child e.g. breaking down the task into small steps, using visuals, physically demonstrating the task for them etc.

Change the Environment

Pay attention to what is going on around the child when he/she is experiencing success or difficulty (i.e. noise, level of activity, visual distractions). Minimize the environmental factors that make performance difficult for the child.

Help by Understanding

Understanding the nature of the child's difficulties will help you to problem solve and provide your child with a rich learning experience. If children feel supported and understood, they are more likely to attempt new activities and to persevere until they achieve success.

Example of Visual Supports:

Morning routine...

Wake up 07.30am	
Get up 07.40am	
Get dressed	
Go downstairs for breakfast 08.00am	
Take tablet	
Go upstairs to wash hands, face, teeth 08.15am	
Get shoes, jacket and bag	
Leave for school 08.30am	

Before I leave for school check I have.....

Schoolbag	
Jacket	
Lunch box	
Water bottle	
Keys	
Sports bag <i>(Fridays)</i>	

P.E. Uniform

1	Underwear	
2	T-Shirt	
3	Tracksuit bottoms	
4	Jumper	
5	Socks	
6	Trainers	

Things to do before I leave school...

1) Check homework is written in journal	
2) Pack Schoolbag	
3) Close schoolbag	
4) Put on coat	

CLEANING MY ROOM....

1	Put all the dirty clothes in the laundry basket
2	Put any clean clothes back in my wardrobe
3	Put shoes in wardrobe
4	Put toys back where they belong (lego, Xbox games, DVDs...)
5	Bring plates and cups back to the kitchen
6	Put all the rubbish into the rubbish bin

When I set the table this is what I get



1	4 Knives	
2	4 Forks	
3	4 Glasses	
4	Ketchup	
5	Salt & Pepper	



Use of Visual Timers:

- **If your child;**
 - Loses track of time when engrossed in a favorite activity
 - Has difficulty sustaining concentration on task
 - Is generally disorganized and easily distracted
 - Has a poor concept of time
- **You can use a visual timer to help with;**
 - Staying on task when doing homework
 - Keeping breaks from homework short
 - Limiting the amount of time on one task (e.g. Playstation)
 - Limiting the amount of time in the shower/bath
 - Morning routine – set time for getting dressed/eating breakfast
 - Countdown to bedtime
 - Waiting time (e.g. until you leave to go to friends house)

You can use an egg timer or a kitchen timer, or download an app on your phone, however if this is even more distracting for your child, a visual timer like the one pictured can be helpful.