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Learning Strategies

Attention and Focus Challenges

These challenges are often connected to difficulties with executive functioning like having a hard time regulating yourself in daily life.

For example, it may be difficult to

- direct your attention to necessary tasks when needed
- stay on task or complete projects when needed or directed
- control impulses (like interrupting others, fidgeting or talking too much)
- remember things (like difficulty following instructions, misplacing keys/phone/tools)
- regulate emotions
- stay motivated to complete tasks that aren't interesting to you (you may procrastinate and have difficulties with time-management)

For help with any of these, connect with your instructor, tutor or us!

Here are some things you could try.

1. When it's time to learn, make sure you have a good space to work. What works for you? Quiet, with music playing, lots of light, not so much light? What do you need to have with you? Find the way you

learn the best. Odds are, you may need to get rid of as many distractions as you can.

2. Take breaks – be sure to get up and walk around every 10-15 minutes so you don't get too tired. Maybe use a timer so you have a cue to get back to work 😊.
3. Stick to a routine as much as possible. Study at the same time each day in the same spot.
4. Switch it up! A strategy or routine might work for a bit. But if it stops working, switch it up and find something new to try. This isn't failure – it's working with your brain!
5. Exercise regularly – this can help manage some of your challenges.
6. Focus on your strengths. Are you sometimes able to hyperfocus? Do you come up with creative solutions for problems? Can you somehow do 4 things at once? Build on these instead of focusing on your weaknesses.

If you have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), you might want to discuss medication and other supports with your family doctor.

Communication and Time-Management

1. Ask for a to-do list of required tasks. Have a big project? Ask for some help with a checklist to break it up into smaller pieces. Creating checklists can be tricky. It might take some practice to be able to do this on your own.

2. Ask for help with priorities so you know what should be completed first.
3. Let your instructor know what's working and what isn't. There are many strategies that could work for you. You might have to try a few before you find what works for you the best.
4. Try assistive technology (like timers, apps, calendars). More on this in the "Using Digital Devices" section below.

Reading and Writing

1. Do you get distracted by sounds? If so, consider using earplugs or noise cancelling headphones when reading or writing.
2. What about busy spaces (like other people walking by)? Try working in a private workspace where you can close the door and not be disturbed.
3. You might have difficulty tracking lines when reading. If so, follow along with a ruler or your finger to keep your place. If you're reading on a screen, you can use the cursor.
4. Pick reading activities that uses some information you already know or topics you're familiar with. That way, you can add to what you already know. This can help you learn new material.
5. Use a Monitoring Checklist when you're reading. It should have a checklist for things you should think about

- a. before you read
 - b. while you read
 - c. after you read
6. To organize your writing, try a mind map tool.
[Coggle](#) is available online for free.
7. To edit your writing, review your writing for one thing at a time using COPS.

C	Capitals
O	Overall appearance like neatness and margins
P	Punctuation
S	Spelling

Math

1. Decrease distractions. Sit at the front of the class when learning or use a quiet room when learning. Give yourself extra time. Use timers to take frequent breaks.
2. Ask for a sample problem with step-by-step instructions.
3. Use graphic organizers or visual aids (like graph paper) to help line up numbers and keep work organized.
4. Ask for support to break down complex problems into smaller, manageable and numbered steps.
5. Highlight math symbols and signs with different colours to help you focus on the operation required.

6. Connect math concepts to real life situations to make learning more interesting and relevant.
7. Talk through a problem. This can help you better understand it and come up with a solution.
8. Use calculators.
9. Use math reminders or tricks like BEDMAS. This is a reminder to complete math steps in this order - Brackets, Exponents, Division, Multiplication, Addition, Subtraction.

Using Digital Devices

There are all kinds of cool apps that can help with executive functioning skills. These will take some time to figure out. Work with your instructor or tutor to give them a try. You'll likely need some practice. But once you learn them, they can really make a difference with your learning. If available, you also may want to book an appointment with the assistive/adaptive technologist.

1. Use a calendar to stay on track with appointments, assignments and classes. A great way to do this is with [Google Calendar](#). It's free and you just need a Gmail account. You can use it on your computer or on your smartphone. You can ask it to send you reminders as well.
2. Use a reminder or to-do app on your computer, your phone or in a notebook. A reminder app is great because you can make a list of things you need to get done. You can set it to notify you at a certain time.

3. [Goblin Tools](#) (available in app store). There is a free version, but the full version is \$0.99. It's designed to break down tasks that can be overwhelming or difficult. You can rate a task that you feel is very overwhelming as extremely hot or spicy. It will help you break it down into smaller steps.
4. [Focus/Commit](#) (available in app store). It focuses on getting things done in short bursts while taking frequent breaks.
5. [Habitica](#) (available in app store for free). This is a productivity app that uses elements of gaming and role-playing. It helps you build positive habits and achieve goals.

Other Resources You Might Want to Check Out

Interested to learn more? Check out this YouTube channel – [How to ADHD](#) by Jessica McCabe.

[Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada](#)