

## Memory Strategies

Memory is the brain's storage of what is learned and experienced. It allows the remembering and dealing with situations as they happen. Memory impairment is when there are difficulties with parts of that memory system. For example, memory impairment makes it hard to learn new information or to remember old information when it is needed. Some people with memory impairment find themselves losing important items, forgetting what people tell them or what they have read, losing track of time, forgetting what they did or learned recently, and forgetting appointments or meetings. For individuals who have any of these problems, using and practicing the following suggestions can be helpful:

- Provide a basic organization system like a folder or a calendar for important paperwork and information. Encourage making a habit of keeping all important materials in one location.
- Deliver important information in as many modalities as possible. For example, in addition to the conversation, make paper available and encourage writing down information, and provide multiple reminders of important dates and tasks.
- Using visual imagery techniques while reading can help increase retention. Including things like pictures or descriptions can help individuals in remembering written information.
- When having difficulty keeping track of time, setting up cues and reminders may be helpful. To help an individual keep track of time during meetings, it can be useful to develop cues that help the individual stay mindful.
- Some individuals have difficulty remembering recent events, even what they did the previous day. Provide paper to take notes during events to improve memory.
- Encourage completion of tasks that challenge their memories, such as asking them to memorize new names. This may help them remember recent information.
- Make sure that when important meetings are scheduled, they are immediately put in calendars along with appropriate notes. Encourage setting alarms for each appointment and correct immediately if information is repeated back incorrectly.
- Poor sleep can contribute to memory impairment. Review the attached sleep checklist to help promote better sleep habits.
- Consider scheduling regular appointments that fall on the same day and time of each week if possible.

## **Delayed Processing**

Delayed processing is the brain's decreased ability to quickly make sense of information like words and information that come from sights and sounds. Delayed processing can cause difficulty following conversations, taking too long to respond, or remembering only one or two steps when following directions. Individuals may appear spacey, mentally foggy or sluggish. Using and practicing the following tips can be helpful:

- Delayed processing can result in being more vulnerable to distractions. Distractions can be related to either visual or noise. Ask for meetings to be held in places away from distractions.
- It may take extra time to figure out what someone is trying to communicate. Where possible, ask for extra time in groups or classes.
- To help follow directions with a lot of steps, ask the person speaking to pause in order to write down each step. This will prevent having to multitask during the meeting.
- Physical activity increases activity in the areas of the brain where processing happens. Make sure to make exercise part of your day and, if possible, walk during meetings.
- Poor sleep can make slow processing worse. Review the attached sleep checklist to help support better sleep habits.

## Attention Strategies

There are different kinds of attention. One kind involves thinking about one thing for a short period of time, another type helps ignoring distractions and another type allows shifting attention from one thing to another. Individuals with attention problems have a hard time staying focused during meetings, may get off-topic during conversations, and may have trouble remembering important details. Having trouble finishing tasks, especially when it is noisy or when distracted, is a common problem. Using and practicing the following suggestions can be helpful:

- Visual aids like handouts can improve attention during meetings. Encourage note-taking skills to record important information. For example, write down the date of the next meeting before ending the current meeting.
- To help complete required assignments, break assignments into smaller and shorter steps. Present information in short and concise segments, one at a time. For example, fill out a single form at a time.
- To help remember meetings or important court dates, encourage visual aids such as the calendar and reminder function on phone/watch/computer or a paper calendar.
- To confirm understanding and retention of important information, ask the individual periodically to summarize the conversation. For example, have the individual repeat what needs to be completed before the next meeting.
- Attention problems can worsen as the day progresses, so consider scheduling appointments early in the day when possible.
- Poor sleep can contribute to inattention. Review the attached sleep checklist to help promote better sleep habits.

## **Inhibition Problems/Impulsivity**

Impulsivity is not thinking before acting or saying something. Cutting someone off before they finish talking or doing the first thing that comes to mind are also examples. It may be hard to control emotions and show them in ways that others will understand.

Even though these behaviors are not on purpose, individuals can get in trouble for these actions. Using and practicing the following suggestions can be helpful:

- Stop > Think > Act! When acting on the first thing that comes to mind, STOP and count to 3 and think about the possible outcomes before doing anything.
- Breathing techniques can help an individual relax when feeling out-of-control. A simple exercise is to focus on breathing for 60 seconds. Breathe in through the nose, hold the breath for 6 seconds, and then breathe out through the mouth.
- Wait until others have finished talking before sharing thoughts. Instead of disrupting conversations, try silently repeating the question(s) to before offering an answer. This can help avoid cutting others off when they are speaking.
- If it is hard to stay focused in any setting, physical or mental breaks can help. For example, try going for a short walk to take a break and refocus.
- When working with others in a group setting, bring a notepad to write down thoughts as they occur. This can help avoid any interruptions that may have been caused by speaking out of turn.
- Write down step-by-step instructions or create a checklist to help complete tasks or instructions.
- Poor sleep can contribute to impulsivity. Review the attached sleep checklist to help promote better sleep habits.

## Physical and Sensorimotor

Physical and sensorimotor problems can include pain, blurred vision, difficulty hearing, and light or noise sensitivity. In day-to-day life, this may appear as dizziness, headaches, difficulty reading, and difficulty concentrating. These problems can impact performance and mood and can also disrupt sleep, resulting in daytime sleepiness. Some individuals describe this as cognitive overload. Using and practicing the following suggestions can be helpful:

- Notice what aggravates symptoms by keeping a journal of daily activity, substance use, or diet. With that information, make changes to help lower symptoms. Try not to use substances like caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco as they can make headaches, light sensitivity and pain worse.
- Mindfulness has been shown to help pain as well as light and noise sensitivity. A common exercise is to place one hand on the stomach and then inhale slowly through the nose to the count of four. Feel the stomach expand with the breath. After the count of four, exhale through the mouth slowly to the count of four. Feel the stomach deflate with the release of breath. Repeat this cycle three times.
- Schedule 5-10-minute breaks after a difficult or mentally taxing task and minimize daytime naps to 20-30 minutes.
- Engage in daily exercise to promote a more regular sleep cycle and make it easier to navigate daily.
- Ask for large print options, for breaks, or to dim the lights or to close doors during meetings.
- To maximize field of view, sit at the front of the room during meetings or in group settings.
- Poor sleep is the most important contributor to dizziness, headaches, difficulty reading, difficulty concentrating, and daytime sleepiness. Make the most of sleep by using the attached sleep checklist materials.

## Language Problems

Individuals with language problems can have a hard time knowing what others are saying and can struggle to put their own thoughts into words. They may also have a hard time with reading. These problems can make individuals feel nervous to talk to others, can make it hard to do work, and can make the individual feel alone. Practicing and using the following tips can be helpful:

- Don't be afraid to ask for things that are needed. Ask people to speak slower, repeat what they said, or to ask their question in a different way when they are not understood.
- It may be helpful to write down important points or tasks or can also use a voice recorder.
- To best follow when reading, try to read in places with no distractions. Read sentences aloud and use a bookmark or finger when reading a sentence to focus on one line at a time and not lose your place.
- Try using paper notes or electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, computers, tablets) to communicate ideas if it is hard to say things out loud.
- Poor sleep can make language problems worse. Review the attached sleep checklist to learn better sleep habits.

## **Organization Problems**

Organization is the ability to use time, energy or resources in a helpful way to finish goals or tasks. Individuals who have a hard time with organization have problems keeping a schedule, prioritizing, starting tasks, switching from one activity to another, or keeping up with time-sensitive tasks (for example, paying bills, completing paperwork, etc.). Using and practicing the following tips can be helpful:

- To help master a schedule, use a notebook, planner, or digital calendar and reminder app on a smart phone. Review weekly and monthly schedules frequently.
- For trouble prioritizing duties, use a system of highlighting important events, bill due dates, and other deadlines.
- For having a hard time remembering important activities or appointments, set up a routine by asking that regular appointments be scheduled on the same day and at the same time.
- To help switch between tasks, set a timer or use a watch to alert when to wrap up one task, and when to get ready for the next task.
- For having a hard time finishing projects on time or correctly, break them down into smaller, simple tasks and cross off each step as it is completed.
- Poor sleep can add to organizational difficulties. Review the attached sleep to help improve sleep habits.

## **Mental Flexibility**

Mental flexibility is the ability to quickly respond to changes in the environment. Individuals may have trouble thinking about multiple ideas at once or switching between thoughts. There may be difficulty deciding what to do when faced with a new problem, changing one's mind, learning new ways of doing things, or understanding why somebody else acts differently. In many settings, this may present as being stubborn, uncooperative, or unwilling to change. Using and practicing the following suggestions can be helpful:

- When planning a schedule, leave extra time before a due date and set reminders. These reminders can be set on a smart phone, on a paper calendar, or on post-it notes on the wall
- In order to improve mental flexibility, practice simple routines out of order. For example, get dressed or ready for bed in a different order.
- To stay on track with required assignments, write out the steps to lengthy assignments and cross steps off as they are completed.
- Write down pros and cons, perhaps with help from trusted friends or family. Consider short-and long-term consequences for actions.
- Try new things, like making a new friend who has different interests than you, tasting a new food, or learning a new dance.
- Exercise directly benefits cognition. Make time to exercise several days a week.
- Poor sleep can contribute to poor mental flexibility. Review the attached sleep checklist to promote better sleep habits.