

Learning difficulties

Main idea

Understanding the special needs of children who have learning difficulties

Outcomes

At the completion of this session trainees will understand:

- The special support strategies required when teaching children with learning difficulties
- How to identify learning difficulties in the pre-school and primary school years
- Some of the teaching strategies that can be used in the one-on-one session
- Some strategies to assist with behavior problems

Preparation: Be familiar with the memory games and listening game outlined; be familiar with the exercises for developing left-right brain coordination

Materials required

Five different objects on a tray for one of the memory games

Content

Special support strategies

- Make allowances for short attention span – not too long on one activity
- They will respond to the ‘warm and close’ (one-on-one) experience
- Make your session interesting! It should be an enjoyable experience – connecting with you as a friend and helper
- Use learning aids that catch their interest – colour, objects, games e.g. bottle top letters
- Plenty of interesting activities
- Right time of day
- Set a routine

Helping them know left from right

- Put a dot on the hand they write with.
- Make a capital L with the thumb and first finger of the left hand.
- Help them to know that they start writing on the left-hand side of the page.

Rewards - short term and long term: Star charts / Progress charts

Goal setting

- Help them see the big picture.

Ask questions such as:

- “Why would it be good to be able to read well?”
- “What do we have to do to become good at reading?”

- “Who would you like to read a story to?”

Encourage the student to practice a story until they are confident enough to read to someone.

Difficulties in performing language-based tasks

- Especially reading, spelling, writing
- Difficulties in co-ordination
- Reversing letters and words
- Sometimes called ‘dyslexia’. The same support principles apply to A.D.D, A.D.H.D and Autism

Learning difficulties may be caused by...

The underdevelopment of certain parts of the brain. These are:

- The part that gives signals to connect the left and right sides of the brain
- The part for balance and coordination

There can be an imbalance between the right and left sides of the brain.

- The right side is responsible for creative activities.
- The left side is responsible for language, mathematics and putting things in order.

In some people, the brain has to work much harder than in others because they are trying to use their right side of the brain (the creative side) for the purpose that the left side of the brain does best (language). They will become tired!

Positives

Creativity!

Many famous people have learning difficulties, e.g. Einstein, Leonardo Da Vinci, Steve Jobs

Causes

- Hereditary factors
- Environmental toxins
- Nutrition

Special support

People with learning difficulties will have a greater chance of improving if the problem is identified early (pre-school years), and if attention is given to:

- language learning strategies
- nutrition
- exercises for coordination and strengthening the parts of the brain that are weaker.

The pre-school child with learning difficulties

Strengths:

- building and construction activities
- creative activities

- problem-solving activities

Weaknesses:

- memory e.g. forgetting instructions
- putting things in the right order, e.g. patterns; letters, numbers
- speech e.g. getting words mixed up
- listening - poor concentration
- physical activities like catching balls
- rhythm – can't clap in time
- trouble knowing left/right
- colour recognition

Students with these difficulties will need more help and additional practice in:

- ball skills
- balancing
- using play equipment
- dance
- songs and rhymes with actions
- stories and listening games
- memory games
- putting things in order
- activities with colours, shapes and patterns
- threading beads, play dough (for small finger muscles)
- sorting and grouping things, e.g. put all the red things together
- holding a pencil

Activities: Memory games

- "I went shopping". (First person says, "I went shopping and bought a pineapple. Second person says, "I went shopping and bought a pineapple and a coconut. Third person says, "I went shopping and bought a pineapple, a coconut and a pair of shoes etc.)
- 5 objects on a tray. Take one away. Which one is missing?
- Play a listening game: "Listen and copy". Leader makes a series of sounds while partner closes eyes, e.g. clap, clap, clap, tap, tap, tap, (with a pen on a table), ting, ting, ting (with a pen on a glass). Partner has to copy. Then change the order.

The Primary School child with learning difficulties

Strengths

- reading maps and diagrams
- building, making things, art
- drama

Weaknesses

- memory
- concentration

- putting things in order
- following instructions
- remembering information
- literacy
- reading difficulties
- difficulty in recognizing sight words
- problems with phonics
- problems with retelling stories in correct order of events
- difficulties reading aloud – lack of fluency and expression; leaving out words; making up words; pronunciation problems
- spelling difficulties
- reversal of letters (back-to-front)
- wrong use of phonics
- problems identifying individual sounds

Expressive Writing difficulties

- ideas are jumbled (mixed up)
- words/phrases missed out
- punctuation problems

Handwriting difficulties

- poor muscle control in their fingers
- letters not written correctly, e.g. back-to-front
- write slowly
- messy writing

Problems with focusing on the task

- poor concentration
- poor listening
- doesn't want to read or write
- easily distracted
- think up things to do, to avoid doing what they have to do
- lack confidence

Behaviour problems

- Identify the cause
- Physical problems – tired, hungry, itchy, has a cold, poor eyesight
- Learning problems
- Emotional problems

Dealing with misbehaviour

- By forming strong relationships with the children in your care, they will respect you.
- When they respect you, they will take to heart your words of correction.
- They will not respond to physical or verbal abuse.
- Never discipline out of anger.

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Positive behaviour charts

You could make a personal list of positive behaviour points the child must aim for. A reward can be given at the end of the week for doing well.

Week ending:	15 th July
Trying my best	✓✓
Neat writing	✓
Good listening	✓
Being on time	✓ ✓

Summary of Support strategies

- phonics
- memory building exercises
- listening activities
- seating closer to front of class
- one-on-one assistance
- work needs to be simplified; larger print size
- use of colour
- don't make them do a lot of copying or a lot of writing. (Bottle top letters can be good!)
- help them with visual tracking – use a ruler beneath line of words while reading
- strategies for remembering left and right
- don't give them too many spelling words or sight words to learn at one time. No more than 5.
- talk about the pictures to help them get the meaning
- break words up into syllables

Raising self-esteem

Self-esteem is: how well or how badly a person feels about themselves

- show understanding of student's problems
- discuss problems and find solutions
- identify strengths; point out that some famous people have had these problems.
- praise them for good efforts
- be aware of any bullying and alert the teacher

Activities

Learn some action rhymes and other activities that help with left-right brain coordination.

Appendix

Activities for L-R brain coordination

Pat head while rubbing stomach

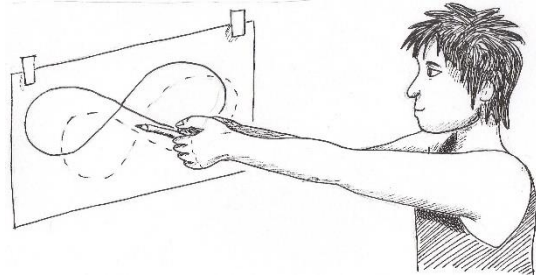
Figure 8 drawing

Ask student to draw a figure 8 holding the pencil with both hands.

Or say this rhyme several times while drawing a figure 8 in the air using both hands.

Ishy Wishy

Ishy Wishy was a fishy, swish, swish, swish.



Mirror drawing

Ask the student to take two pencils, one in each hand. Draw a dotted line vertically down the centre of a blank page. Ask them to draw something symmetrical using both hands at once, e.g. a house, a flower, a ball, a tree



Students can mirror draw in the air to this rhyme:

I can draw a circle, I can draw a square
I can draw a diamond in the air.
I can draw a tower, I can draw a flower
I can draw a pussy cat sitting on a chair

Peas Porridge

Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold,
Peas porridge in the pot, nine days old.
Some like it hot, some like it cold.
Some like it in the pot, nine days old.

Actions:

First time: Knees, clap, pat, clap

Second time: Knees, clap, cross, cross

The “Cross crawl”

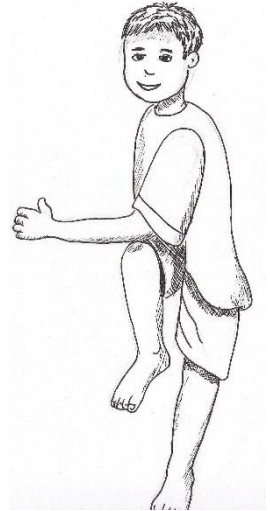
Say a rhyme such as:

One potato, two potato, three potato four
Five potato, six potato, seven potato more
Eight potato, nine potato, now we’re up to ten,
Eleven potato, twelve potato time to start again. (or no time to start again)

Actions:

While standing, do the following in time to the rhyme, said several times:

1. Lift left knee and slap with right palm.
2. Place left foot on ground.
3. Lift right knee and slap with left palm.
4. Place right foot on ground.
5. Continue with this pattern for the whole rhyme.



Ear-nose switch

Hold nose with left first finger and thumb.

At the same time hold left earlobe with right first finger and thumb.

Now switch so that right hand is holding nose and left hand is holding right earlobe.

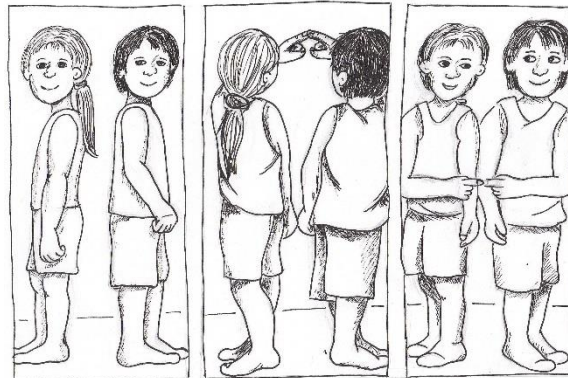
Keep switching

Bead on a String (Activity to strengthen near far focus)

String 60 cm in length and 1 bead. Student holds one end of string at chest height. The other end is tied to something like a window lever. Start with the bead far away and the adult gradually moves bead closer to the student’s nose. The student should concentrate on the bead continually. Then move the bead to the other end of the string again while the student focuses.

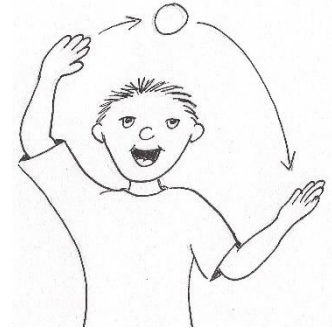
Robot Zap

Students line up in pairs, back to back. Students reach right hand over their left shoulders, touching the tip of the index finger of the student behind. Then they reach left hand over right shoulder. Repeat alongside their hips left and right, and finally bend over and do alongside their ankles, left and right. As they touch finger tips, they call out, “zap.”



Solo Catch

Play catch with yourself! Hold the ball in your right hand, Then toss the ball over your head and catch it with the left hand. How many times can you toss it back and forth without missing?



Brain Squeeze

Squeeze a tennis ball or play dough in the right hand hard, then in the left hand.

Over, Under

Over, under, round and through
What a tricky thing to do.

Actions:

1. Take a small object, like a rubber or eraser.
2. Stand.
3. Take the rubber in your right hand and pass it under your left knee.
4. With your left hand take the rubber and pass it under your right knee.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4.

Simple playground equipment and activities:

- Climbing ladders
- Log or board to balance on, jump over in zigzag pattern
- Swings
- Overhead bars to swing from, cross over
- Jump ropes
- Balls to shoot into basket, kick at goal, hit with bat, bounce to another student