

Ideas to Support Students with Learning Disabilities During Unstructured Time

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE

PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Pronouncing or saying words properly
 - Hearing sounds in words
 - Following conversations and play
 - Finding or making rhyming words
 - Distinguishing sounds

LANGUAGE

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Finding the right words and phrases to explain events
 - Remembering or keeping track of social conversations
 - Social communication – initiating play, entering or joining a group, asking for a turn, expressing needs to peers
 - Noticing someone is addressing him/her in a loud environment
 - Responding to adults with comments that are in context and/or appropriate for the situation
 - Joining into groups
 - Understanding sarcasm, idioms and nonverbal/paraverbal communication
 - Matching his/her tone of voice, body language, voice volume and word choice to the social situation

VISUAL-MOTOR SKILLS

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Motor clumsiness
 - Eye-hand coordination and/or motor planning – e.g. poor running skills, ball catching skills
 - Orienting body in space – may bump into people
 - Transitioning in and out of line – may accidentally invade the space of others
 - Responding quickly to motor tasks – there may be a delay in entering a game or following a request
 - Learning new motor movements e.g. jumping jacks

VISUAL-SPATIAL (PERCEPTUAL) SKILLS

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Making sense of games/play he/she is watching
 - Reading body language and non-verbal cues, such as personal space, facial expression, and tone of voice – can lead to misreading social cues
 - Understanding what areas of the yard to play in and orienting in the yard – e.g. understanding left and right
 - Orienting in space
 - The student may get lost or wander, bump into things, appear clumsy

MEMORY

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Remembering the rules of games or what to do when his/her turn comes up in a game
 - Relating to events that happened previously in the yard – e.g. a new rule that was recently introduced
 - Recalling previous events
 - Recalling specifically what was told to him/her by a teacher in the yard the day before or at a previous unstructured time
 - Restarting a game that was played at an earlier time
 - Generalizing skills between classroom and yard and transferring skills between games

PROCESSING SPEED

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Following dynamic play (e.g. play shifting and changing)
 - Following fast-paced dialogue
 - Managing social requests/pressure to perform faster - this may cause confusion or frustration

ATTENTION

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Turn-taking or focussing on an isolated activity
 - Managing unexpected outcomes – may become easily upset which could result in crying or aggression
 - Managing emotions and on-the-spot decision making – may act or speak without thinking situations through and may look like he/she is intentionally provoking others or disobeying rules
 - Following safety rules e.g. climbing the baseball fence
 - Managing peer pressure

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

- Students may have difficulty with:
- Applying the rules even when he/she can articulate them
 - Monitoring his/her actions
 - Finding solutions for a problem, especially if the student needs to adapt quickly to changes
 - Managing emotions – may present as crying or aggression
 - Acting/speaking before thinking situations through e.g. insulting a peer
 - Understanding how his/her actions/choices impact others
 - Expressing him/herself effectively

PRE-TEACHING AND PREVENTION

- Teach the student to ask clarifying questions when he/she is confused
- Pre-teach vocabulary used in games and play
- Provide scripting that can be used during play
- Teach peers to ask students for clarification when they cannot understand what a peer is saying
- Teach the student strategies to manage frustration when he/she is misunderstood by peers

- Provide student with opportunities to play active games as well as games involving storytelling or imaginary play
- Help the student arrange a social group to play with prior to unstructured time starting
- Teach the student how to ask others to play and how to pre-arrange play
- Explicitly teach the student strategies to read non-verbal information such as facial expressions and tone of voice
- Use social narratives, modelling and social scripting to teach play skills such as turn taking
- Explicitly pre-teach the rules of games/sports using simple concrete language

- Pre-teach motor skills that are needed for unstructured time, games and provide time for additional practice of new motor skills
- Teach unstructured time games that have low motor demands
- Provide opportunities for unstructured time activities with fewer motor demands
- Pre-teach peers about the difference between accidental and intentional incidents and provide scripting to support situations
- Pre-teach the concept of personal space
- Establish line-up, entry and exit routines
- Ensure student has the right-sized play equipment
- Match the student up with a buddy to practise skills and engage in play
- Avoid having the student switch roles and positions in games

- Provide visual boundaries in the yard e.g. pylons
- Pre-teach peers about the difference between accidental and intentional incidents and provide scripting to support situations
- Pre-teach the concept of personal space
- Explicitly teach the student strategies to read non-verbal information such as facial expressions
- Provide student opportunities to orient his/herself on fields and courts

- Pre-teach games in gym that are transferable to the yard – show the student what to do more than once
- Review unstructured time options prior to the beginning of unstructured time
- Teach generalization skills – e.g. when playing any game on the field everyone stops when they hear the bell
- Visually display unstructured time rules in the yard
- Explicitly teach the boundaries of the yard and where students are allowed to play - when possible provide visual cues to help with boundaries e.g. pylons to show where the field ends
- Ensure yard monitors are visually recognizable

- Review yard/unstructured time expectations prior to the student going out to unstructured time
- Provide opportunities for the student to engage in activities where there are commonly understood rules that do not change during the game
- Pre-teach rules to games and activities
- Teach the student to ask questions when he/she is confused about why he/she is left out of play or thinks the rules have changed
- Model asking questions about rules and play e.g. during gym ask students about rules of the game
- Teach self-advocacy skills

- Provide visual cues for rules about unstructured time in the school yard
- Develop a cuing system with the student to help him/her self-monitor
- Provide lots of opportunities for movement throughout the student's day
- Discuss with the student, prior to unstructured time, what activities he/she is going to do
- Teach the student self-regulation strategies that he/she can use and be prompted by staff
- Cue the student to make good choices during play when needed
- Provide positive and immediate feedback for good unstructured time choices and communicate to others the good choices the student makes
- Promote unstructured time games that involve inclusion rather than elimination
- Promote cooperative rather than competitive play
- Teach student what to do when he/she is waiting – e.g. play I SPY
- Teach mindfulness and self regulation strategies

- Structure unstructured time with the student e.g. provide a list of activities, pre-teach games, provide equipment that the student knows how to use appropriately
- Establish line-up, entry and exit routines
- Pre-teach games in the gym that are transferable to the yard
- Use incentive systems that reward positive behaviours
- Establish one to two goals for unstructured time and develop self-monitoring tools with the student to support him/her
- Teach the student self-regulation strategies
- When possible prepare the student for the end of unstructured time and for changes in unstructured time routines
- Teach strategies to manage common unstructured time problems, such as determining who goes first in a game, getting to class on time
- Teach strategies to manage frustration with a visual tool such as a five point scale
- Establish safe people for the student and foster positive peer relationships

INTERVENTION

- Check to see what the student's understanding of the situation is
- Prompt the student to use a calming strategy (e.g. deep breathing) if he/she is upset or frustrated
- Provide additional time for the student to process language
- Provide the student with additional time to speak and to respond to questions
- Model appropriate responses and techniques to clarify information

- Check to see what the student understands about events that have occurred and how he/she interprets the situation before imposing a consequence
- Use brief, clear and concrete language when speaking with the student – avoid figurative language and sarcasm – keep it short and simple
- Provide the student with extra time to speak and help him/her find words when necessary
- Allow extra time for language to be processed
- Use a visual problem-solving sheet

- If the student is isolated, offer him/her an activity that has less motor demands and support the student to set up play with peers
- Provide additional time for the student to process requests that involve motor activity or motor planning
- Clarify if incidents involving personal space were accidental or intentional
- Provide scripting to help the student resolve misinterpretations
- If the student is frustrated, model calming strategies such as deep breathing
- Join in the game with the student to teach and model the necessary motor skills

- Explain non-verbal cues to the student
- Subtly and positively prompt the student to attend to non-verbal cues
- Clarify the student's understanding of social cues
- Provide the student with scripting to resolve social misinterpretations
- Prompt the student to attend to visual boundaries
- If the student is isolated, offer him/her an activity that has fewer visual-spatial demands and support the student to set up play with peers

- Avoid referencing past events the student may not recall
- Provide the student with expected behaviours visually and verbally
- Keep rules and instructions short and simple
- Chunk instructions and encourage the student to paraphrase instructions
- Remind student of the rules of the game or of other experiences he/she has knowledge of to help him/her generate solutions and if needed provide the student with two positive solutions from which to choose to help him/her solve the problem

- Avoid asking too many questions
- Provide student with additional response time
- Provide the student with two appropriate choices
- Provide the student with social scripting for asking questions (e.g. "When is it my turn?" "Can you explain that rule to me?")

- Keep instructions short and simple
- Check to see what the student understands about events that have occurred and how they interpret the situation before imposing a consequence
- Cue the student to self-regulate
- Provide the student with two structured positive solutions to choose from to help him/her solve the problem
- Use chaining to help the student understand cause and affect
- Use visual reminders and gestures to help cue the student to expectations

- Model the desired response in the moment
- Check to see what the student understands about events that have occurred and how they interpret the situation before imposing a consequence
- Use brief, clear and concrete language when speaking to the student
- Help the student sequence events and provide the student with two positive, realistic choices to choose from to solve the problem
- Use visuals and gestures to support expectations
- Use a visual problem-solving sheet that involves perspective taking to review incidents
- Chunk instructions

This chart is designed as a tool to begin thinking about how to plan and support students during unstructured time in response to a student's assessed area(s) of strength and/or need. These strategies are good for all students and necessary for some. To understand specific processing areas that are impacting an individual student's learning, access the psychoeducational assessment along with other valuable assessment information in the OSR.

This chart is intended to be used in conjunction with the information in the LD module (<https://bww.yrsdb.ca/services/student/Modules/LDModule/LD-Modules.aspx>) and the Understanding Learning Disabilities - How Processing Affects Learning Resource (<https://bww.yrdsb.ca/services/student/Documents/YRDSB%20Documents/ProcessingSkillsChart.pdf>).