

Learning and Memory

About learning and memory

Learning and memory describe the ability to take in, process, store, and recall information. This may be information that we have heard (e.g. spoken instructions) or seen (e.g. being shown the location of items). Learning and remembering information relies on many different skills. First, we need to take in the new information. This relies on sensory processes (e.g. hearing, seeing, touching) and cognitive processes (e.g. paying attention, concentrating, processing information quickly, and storing information in an organised way). Once information is learned, we also need to be able to get that knowledge from our memory stores.

It is common for children to differ in the way they learn information. Some children are very good at learning verbal information, which means they may only need to be told something once for them to recall it. Others may be better at learning and recalling things they have seen.

Many young children with disabilities or developmental disorders need support with learning and memory. Some children with these challenges might find it hard to concentrate for long periods, take in and process information, or they may need more time to learn.



Evidence-based strategies

Maximise a child's understanding

- **Get their attention.** Consider using a gesture, touch, eye contact or verbal prompts to get children's attention before giving instructions or speaking to them.
- **Be clear and specific.** It may be helpful to give clear and specific instructions about the task, the behaviour expected, and how much time they have to work in.
- **Simplify instructions and learning.** Use shorter instructions, step-by-step instructions, and break down complex tasks into shorter tasks. Verbal or visual cues may help.
- **Reduce background noise when giving instructions.** Avoid background noise and distractions while giving instructions to help all children hear and focus on you. Children may need to face away from distractions.

Keep it interesting for the child

- **Where possible, add child interests into the learning process.** For example, if a child is interested in bugs, include activities for them to construct or paint bugs.
- **Vary communication formats.** Keep activities interesting by using a variety of materials and modes. Consider using pictures, videos, songs, objects, or demonstrations to explain new concepts. Hands-on learning can be very engaging.
- **Use games to teach new skills.** Children learn best when they find a task interesting and are having fun. Introduce games and activities that teach self-control (e.g. "Simon Says"), working memory (e.g. finding "hidden treasures" under cups), motor control (hopping, skipping) and planning (e.g. packing for a picnic).
- **Use computer software.** Interactive educational software that uses animation, colours and music may help some children focus.

Adapt activities to suit the child

- **Match activities to abilities. Keep tasks manageable for children.** They may need help (e.g. prompts, demonstrations, encouragement) when learning new skills. As they become more capable, slowly increase the workload or difficulty, or reduce help given.



Provide extra supports

- **Children may need to practise a task or behaviour many times.** Provide them with time to practise in different settings and with different materials to help them learn to use that skill in other situations.
- **Offer fewer tasks with more opportunities to practise.** This is better than offering many tasks with little opportunity to practise.
- **Help them.** When a task is new, children will learn best with help (i.e. prompts, demonstrations, encouragement). This help can be gradually reduced as they become more capable. Help can be provided by educators or other children.
- **Provide frequent reminders.** Verbal and physical prompts can keep children on track with learning tasks.

Set goals for children

- **Set learning goals.** Consider working with the child's family as well as the professionals that support the child to set specific and measurable goals. Aim for goals that focus on the child's strengths but also support a child's learning and social development.

Best practice tips

Ask parents

- Talk to parents to find out the best way to work with their child. Parents can help you understand a child's unique strengths and areas they need support. You could ask parents to complete AllPlay Learn's Child Strengths and Abilities Checklist (under relevant resources) prior to meeting with parents.

Other considerations

Safety drills

- Some children might find it harder to learn or remember safety procedures. They may need extra time, or demonstrations and practice runs.



Transitions

- Children moving from the early childhood education and care setting to another setting (i.e. another early childhood education and care setting or primary school) may need extra support.
- For more information about supporting children with disabilities when transitioning to a different education setting, access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).

Other co-occurring conditions

- Children with learning and memory challenges may also experience [developmental delay](#), [cerebral palsy](#), [autism](#), [anxiety](#), [blind or low vision](#), and [d/Deaf and hard of hearing](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the child.

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for supporting children with learning and memory issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Problem solving guide
- Character strengths poster (A3)