



## Thinking/Cognition

### About thinking/cognition skills

Cognition is another word for thinking or understanding. It includes skills like how fast someone thinks, and their attention, reasoning, and problem solving. Children with disabilities or developmental challenges may face challenges with some types of cognitive skills. These will differ for each child. Children with developmental delay may experience some challenges with how quickly they can think and their ability to understand. They might need information kept short and simple, and they may take longer to understand, think and respond. They may become tired quickly. New tasks can be harder for them to learn and so they might become frustrated. They may engage in challenging or disruptive behavior when feeling frustrated.

Children with developmental disabilities often have a unique profile of strengths and challenges in different areas of their thinking skills. They may show a great understanding of visual information, but need extra time to process information or have trouble concentrating for a long time.

### Evidence-based strategies

#### Consider adjustments to communication style

- **Repeat and simplify instructions.** Use simple words and repeat. Children may need a skill or activity broken down into smaller steps. Some children might need instructions repeated multiple times.
- **Use visual instructions.** Visual instructions about how to do a skill might be needed. Consider demonstrating the task or asking another child to demonstrate. You can also use a visual schedule, poster or video to outline or model the task.
- **Some children may find it easier if they can use gestures.** Some may need to point to the correct answer instead of talking.
- **Include music and simple games in learning experiences.** Children may pay more attention and learn more when including music or simple games in the learning process.



### **Provide lots of opportunities to practise**

- **Children may need to practise a task or behaviour many times.** Time to practise in different settings and with different materials can 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). Gradually reduce this help as they become more capable. This can be provided by educators, or if working in pairs or small groups, by other children.

### **Make each session as structured as possible**

- **Provide a clear schedule and routine.** Visual cues can help children know what is coming up, and how they should move from one activity to another.

### **Provide feedback**

- **Encouragement and correction.** Support participation with encouragement. Encourage or correct immediately when children are learning a task. Reduce this gradually as they become more capable.
- **Check understanding.** Check for understanding by asking specific questions or asking them to repeat instructions.

### **Work collaboratively**

- **Provide plenty of opportunities for children to work together.** Other children can help a child with cognition challenges by restating instructions or showing them how to do a task.
- **Have children play imitation games.** Children with thinking challenges can learn by imitating others. For example, ask children take it in turns to act out a skill or behaviour that the rest of the group copies.



## Other considerations

### Safety

- Some children may not know how to tell an adult if there is an emergency, or what to do in an emergency or emergency drill. Consider making time for demonstrating and practicing what to do.

### Transitions

- A child with cognition challenges may find moving from the early childhood education and care setting to another setting (i.e. another early childhood education and care setting or primary school) challenging.
- 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 thinking skills challenges may also experience [developmental delay](#) or [autism](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the child.