



## Thinking/Cognition

### About thinking/cognition

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 vary for each child. They 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. Each child is unique and will need a tailored approach to their learning.

Some areas that a tailored approach may be helpful in include [attention](#), [learning and memory](#), [processing speed](#), and [planning and organisation](#). More general strategies for supporting a child who has challenges with their thinking are discussed below.

### 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 something might be needed. Consider demonstrating the task or asking another child to demonstrate. Another option is using 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.



### Consider adjustments to activities and rules

- **Aim tasks at current understanding.** Aim tasks at the student's current level of understanding so they can achieve success.
- **Consider what resources are used.** Where appropriate, use concrete materials (such as images to supplement text, blocks to model maths), simplified text or visual guides outlining how to complete a task.

### 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 to 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.
- **Provide extra help.** 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 teachers, 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 let children know what is coming up, and how they should move from one activity to another.
- **Access AllPlay Learn's class schedule.**

### Provide feedback

- **Give praise and correction.** Support participation with praise. Praise 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 cognitive challenges by restating instructions or showing them how to do a task.
- **Allocate specific tasks within the group.** Consider assigning tasks so that a student can use modified materials or instructions if needed.



## Best practice tips

### Teach children to self monitor

- Many children can be taught to self-monitor their behaviour, that is, to record whether they have done what they were asked to do. A self-monitoring form can be found under relevant resources below.

## Other considerations

### Safety drills

- 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 practising what to do.

### Homework

- Some children may find completing homework without help challenging. Work out what a child is able to do without help when assigning homework. Alternatively, consider not giving homework to the class to give the child some time away from books.

### Transitions

- A child with cognitive challenges may find moving from primary school to high school challenging.
- One way to support them with the transition is by helping them with organisation and homework skills, and time- and self- management skills. Give them lots of opportunities to practise these skills.
- For more information about supporting students with disabilities when transitioning to a primary or secondary school setting access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).
- For children transitioning to primary school access AllPlay Learn's Story A school day, and for children transitioning to secondary school access Access AllPlay Learn's story How to be Organised How to be organised



### Other co-occurring conditions

- Children with cognitive challenges may also experience [anxiety](#), [intellectual disability](#), [autism](#) or [attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the student.

### 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 children with attention issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Class schedule
- Student self-monitoring form