

# preschool pack

## Learning Issues

A percentage of children including those with cerebral palsy may experience learning difficulties. It is important to consider that some children presenting with disruptive or avoidance behaviours and low self-esteem may have underlying learning problems.

Learning situations need to be structured to provide opportunities for children to increase their self-esteem, sense of identity and belonging. Experiencing success increases the child's awareness of their own abilities and develops their bank of skills. Use the child's interests and strengths to encourage participation in activities.

The child may show difficulties in interacting with others, taking turns with peers or changing to a new activity. It also may be hard for children to understand consequences of actions or words. A well-planned, consistent program will need to be implemented to assist behaviour changes for the child.

### Learning difficulties may include:

#### A short attention span:

Some children may be more easily distracted and / or unable to concentrate for as long as their peers. It is important to have realistic expectations of what a child can achieve.

#### Ideas to consider:

- Ensure correct seating so children's efforts are put into concentration rather than maintaining balance.
- Use the children's interests to motivate them to participate in activities.
- Seat the child close to the front or near an adult who can prompt him/her to the degree needed to attend and complete activity, gradually withdrawing help to encourage as much independence as possible.
- Gradually increase the length of time spent on each activity and/or at group time.
- Limit distractions where possible - e.g. picking a relatively quiet place for some activities, not having too many toys on the table the child is working on, placing the activity on a plain coloured placemat to help focus attention.

#### Motor planning difficulties:

Children who have motor planning problems know what they want to do but have difficulty planning in their minds how to go about it. Learning tasks can take more effort, concentration and energy and they may have difficulty generalising skills.

These children may be able to do some tasks automatically. However when they are requested to do something or are under pressure to perform, they may have more difficulty planning and executing the task. They often seem to rush into activities without carefully planning the stages required in order to complete them.

**Ideas to consider:**

- Break up complex activities into smaller, achievable steps.
- Encourage the child to stop and think first in order to plan what he/she has to do before starting the activity.
- Encourage the child to identify a starting point and then to complete one step of the activity at a time, while verbalising each step in the sequence.
- Some children may need to have the activity demonstrated and may require some physical prompts initially. This assistance could be gradually withdrawn.
- Try to establish regular routines in the day and for each activity he/she has to do in order to help motor planning.
- Practise and repeat the same sequences.
- Praise success as well as effort and be specific about what is being praised.
- Ensure that the activity is simple, but challenging enough to ensure co-operation and interest.
- Difficulties with motor planning may be more marked when doing a new or unfamiliar activity or when in a new setting.

**Perceptual difficulties:**

Some children may have difficulties with interpreting information from the senses; this includes activities such as judging the size and shape of objects, moving around obstacles, distinguishing between different sounds and understanding spatial positions. Perceptual difficulties impact on learning in all areas of development.

**Ideas to consider:**

- Activities to develop visual perceptual skills include gross motor activities such as climbing frames, obstacle courses, tunnels, etc, and body awareness games.
- Copying block patterns and sequences, sorting and matching, dot to dot games, doing puzzles and “spot the difference” games can also help develop these skills.
- Progress from three-dimensional activities (e.g. Lego, blocks) to two-dimensional pencil and paper activities. Encourage working from left to right and from top to bottom for paper and pencil activities.
- Place the activity on a plain coloured placemat to reduce background clutter and help focus the child’s attention.
- Activities to develop auditory perceptual skills include listening games like Sound Lotto, “I hear”, “Simon says” which involve finding and identifying sounds and listening to instructions, rhymes, clapping to rhythms.

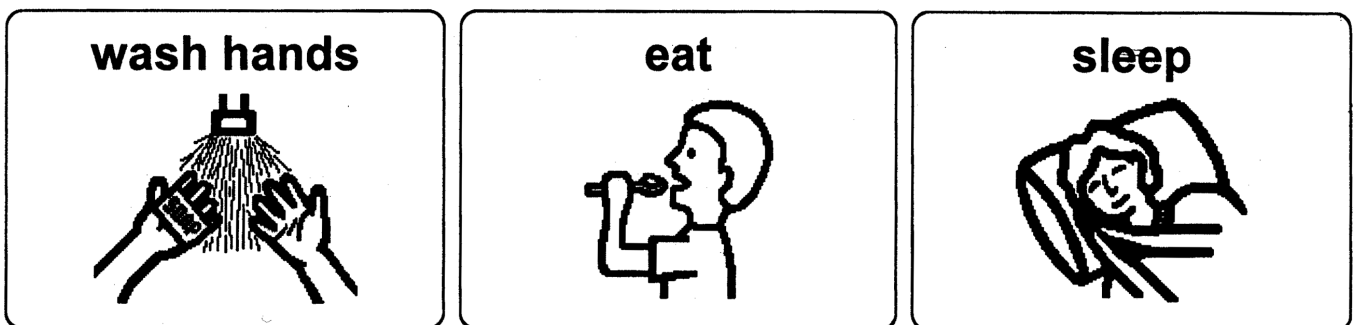
## Communication/language difficulties:

There may be difficulties with understanding language such as following instructions and understanding concepts. Some children may also have difficulty expressing themselves e.g. naming objects, maintaining a conversation, making a choice or request and finding the words they need. Sometimes these difficulties may go unrecognised especially if children become adept at watching and following their peers.

### Ideas to consider:

- Simplify instructions by using simple language and breaking down instructions into smaller steps.
- Repeat instructions and provide additional cues such as gestures, pictures or showing the child what to do.
- Encourage the child to ask for help if the instruction has not been understood.
- Encourage all attempts at communication and provide opportunities for the child to demonstrate understanding in his/her own way e.g. providing verbal/visual choices to pick from.

The use of pictures in a picture sequence or timetable is a valuable cue to use with children with a variety of learning difficulties. A picture sequence can help children develop an understanding of a routine or sequence of activities.



These pictures are from Boardmaker™ Application Software (1994) Dennis L. King

**Each child with cerebral palsy has individual needs.  
In partnership with the child and their family,  
The Spastic Centre team can advise on their needs.**