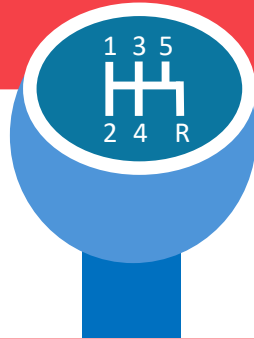




Executive Functions in the Classroom

Shift is one of the most complex executive functions because to be successful we need to monitor our actions, inhibit our first impulse, and change approaches.

SHIFT



Shift is measured with items, such as “I have trouble changing from one activity to another” and tasks like the Wisconsin Card Sorting Task.

How to help students who struggle...

People who have a hard time with Shift tend to struggle with changes in their daily routine. For example, a school fieldtrip might be stressful for a child who struggles with shifting. In turn, adolescents and adults who have difficulty with shifting might appear stubborn, rigid and inflexible in their thinking and have difficulty generating solutions to problems. Developing this skill will help them to be decisive and be flexible problem solvers. Shift is important for teachers because teachers need to be able to shift their attention quickly from student to student and to think flexibly when responding to challenges that arise in the classroom.

Provide Structure: Provide the student with a schedule for the day. Limit disruptions in the student's daily routine. Have clear classroom routines and provide the student with warning that activities in the class will be changing (e.g., “in five minutes we will be putting our reading materials away and be getting ready for Science”). Provide structure when assigning tasks (especially open-ended tasks). Make the steps explicit and provide the student with templates. If you are beginning a new task, try to link it to a similar task the student is familiar with. Go through tasks in a step-by-step fashion so the student has a plan for attempting the assigned work.

Value errors. Normalize mistakes. Think aloud and model your reaction to errors and how they can be useful learning tools.

Provide warning. Students with difficulty shifting would benefit from warnings for unexpected events in the day (fire drill, assembly). Discuss it with the student as soon as possible and plan for how they might cope with the change.

Scaffolding: Over time, introduce gradual change in the student's routine. Support the student's adjustment with meta-cognitive questions: “Today we will be going on a nature walk. What do you need to do to prepare yourself to go on the walk. Who do you think you would like to walk with?”



University of
Lethbridge

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