ANISHINABEK
EDUCATION SYSTEM

Special Education
Handbook Series

Guiding Growth: Responsive Strategies for Diverse Learners

Elementary to High School

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Introduction

Every student brings unique strengths and areas of need to the classroom. This handbook offers practical strategies to help educators recognize and support student needs—promoting success and bimaadziwin. While the behaviours and traits discussed may be seen in students with or without disabilities, the strategies included are beneficial for all learners.

This guide aims to help answer:

1. What behaviours are you observing in the classroom?
2. What might these behaviours be telling us about the student?
3. What practical strategies can you implement as an educator to provide support?
4. When should you seek professional assistance, and who should you contact?

Created by Surrey Place in partnership with the Kinoomaadziwin Education Body, this resource is informed by a series of presentations aimed at strengthening special education capacity among educators and caregivers. To access the full set of recorded presentations, scan the QR code below to access the Virtual Learning Environment, or visit: **https://fnelo.elearningontario.ca/** to access your account. Readers are encouraged to reflect critically on the content, which primarily draws from Western knowledge systems. Equally important are Indigenous perspectives and teachings, which should be considered when planning and delivering student support. The handbook also underscores the importance of avoiding diagnostic overshadowing—the risk of attributing all student behaviours to a known diagnosis, which may mask other important health or developmental needs. Educators are urged to ensure that students have access to culturally safe, regular physical health care (including vision, hearing, and dental check-ups) to rule out medical causes of concern before or alongside other interventions.

KEB Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) registration form.

Supporting Behaviour and Success at School and at Home

Supporting Behaviour and Student Success at School and at Home

Behaviour Support

What am I observing?

You may notice a student who:

- ☐ Engages in physical aggression, such as hitting, kicking, biting, or pushing others.
- ☐ Uses verbal aggression, including yelling, screaming, or swearing at peers or staff.
- ☐ Damages school property, such as tearing materials or throwing objects.
- ☐ Struggles to follow instructions, frequently refuses tasks, or requires ongoing one-on-one support to engage in work.
- ☐ Leaves the classroom or designated area without permission or supervision.
- ☐ Has difficulty understanding or following social norms, such as taking turns, sharing, or respecting personal space.
- ☐ Shows difficulty with attention and may be impulsive or overly active in ways that interfere with learning or safety.

What might this indicate?

"Behaviour" refers to any action a student says or does. In the classroom, challenging behaviour often signals that a student's needs are not being fully met.

These behaviours can reflect a student's:

- **Health** *(e.g., fatigue, illness, hunger, pain).*
- **Mental health** *(e.g., anxiety, trauma, stress).*
- **Life circumstances** *(e.g., changes at home, transitions, grief).*
- **Environment or interactions** *(e.g., specific people, situations).*

Ask yourself:

- When and where is the behaviour happening—or not happening?
- What might the student be trying to communicate?
- What do I hope the student does instead?
- What skills might they be missing that would help them cope or succeed?



What strategies can I try?

- **Ensure safety:** Modify the classroom to reduce risks *(e.g., remove unsafe items, adjust seating, add supervision).*
- **Build trust:** Connect with the student by spending time together in a positive, pressure-free way.
- **Incorporate interests:** Use the student's strengths and preferences to boost engagement.
- **Establish routines:** Predictability helps reduce anxiety and support self-regulation.
- **Prepare for change:** Let the student know about transitions or changes ahead of time.

To explore the root causes of behaviour and match supports more effectively, refer to the next section on *Functional Behaviour Assessment*.

When should I seek professional input and who should I contact?

- If you think there may be an underlying medical or health issue, connect with the student's caregiver to initiate a follow-up appointment with a health care provider.
- If you think there may be an underlying mental health issue, connect with your school administrator for the referral process to appropriate professionals within the school system or in the community (e.g., Psychologist, Social Worker, Psychiatrist).
- If the family is in need of support, connect with your school administrator for the referral process to appropriate professionals within the school system or in the community.
- If your current strategies (class-wide and student specific) haven't been met with improvement in the challenging behaviour(s), refer to a Registered Behaviour Analyst who can assist you with carrying out a formal functional behaviour assessment (FBA).
- If the student has difficulties in speech and language or in motor abilities, consider referrals to a Speech and Language Pathologist or an Occupational Therapist. These professionals may be able to work collaboratively with you and the Behaviour Analyst to come up with a comprehensive plan to address the challenging behaviours.

Functional Behaviour Assessment: Why Do Students Do What They Do?

Context is Everything

When we talk about context, we're referring to everything that happens before and after a behaviour- including both immediate factors and a student's past experiences. To better understand the behaviour, it helps to break the immediate context down into a sequence:

A ➡ B ➡ C

Antecedent ➡ Behaviour ➡ Consequence

- **Antecedent:** What happened *right before* the behaviour occurred?
- **Behaviour:** What the student *said or did*—this could be a challenging behaviour or a skill we're trying to teach.
- **Consequence:** What happened *immediately after* the behaviour? What was the effect on the student and those around them?

This ABC sequence offers a snapshot in time. While it can appear linear and tidy, human behaviour is complex. Factors like physical and emotional health, developmental level, medication, previous experiences, and expectations all influence how a student behaves—many of these may not be visible in the moment.

The ABC model is a useful starting point for understanding behaviour, but we must always remain open to broader influences that may be at play.

Functions of Behaviour

Even when behaviour is disruptive, harmful, or seems irrational—it serves a purpose. All behaviour is adaptive and functional. Our role is to figure out what the student is trying to achieve or avoid, and to help them meet those needs in safer, more constructive ways.

If a challenging behaviour continues over time, it's being reinforced in some way—it is working for the student. The function of a behaviour may include:

- Gaining or avoiding attention
- Getting or escaping from activities
- Accessing or avoiding tangible items
- Seeking or escaping sensory input
- Or a combination of the previous bullets
- If the function of the behaviour is unclear, it's not time to intervene yet—it's time to learn more.

This is where Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBAs) and Functional Analyses (FAs) come in. Depending on the complexity of the case, it may be necessary to consult with professionals, such as a Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) or other specialists trained in behaviour analysis.

Functional Behaviour Assessment

A Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) is a structured process used to gather information about a student's behaviour in order to develop effective, function-based strategies for support. The goal is to understand why a behaviour is happening and how to address it meaningfully.

An FBA typically includes:

- Clearly defining the target behaviour(s) in observable and measurable terms
- Collecting information through interviews, observations, and data tracking to identify when and where the behaviour occurs (or doesn't), and what factors seem to increase or decrease its likelihood
- In some cases, testing hypotheses by intentionally setting up situations to confirm what "triggers" or "reduces" the behaviour

The purpose of an FBA is to inform the development of a practical, evidence-based support plan that addresses the function of the behaviour.

For a step-by-step guide, check out the Efficient Functional Behaviour Assessment document by PBIS (linked in the Resources section).

Creating a Solid Classroom Routine

What am I observing?

- ☐ Transitions between activities are taking too long—or not happening at all.
- ☐ Students appear confused about what they are supposed to be doing.
- ☐ Frequent verbal reminders are needed to keep students on task.

What might these behaviours tell us about the student?

- The student may not fully understand the expectations.
- The student may not have been taught the routine or prepared for the upcoming transition.
- Activities may be too lengthy or students may have lost interest or forgotten what to do.

What strategies can I try?

Consistent, predictable routines help structure the day, reduce stress, and promote a sense of belonging. When routines are well-established, educators can model calm, safe, and predictable behaviour while fostering a supportive learning environment.

A strong daily routine can:

- Provide predictability and structure.
- Reduce challenging behaviours by clarifying expectations.
- Help students feel safe, secure, and ready to learn—especially during stressful times.
- Support adaptability to everyday changes and challenges.
- Create opportunities to build independence, self-help, and safety skills.
- Contribute to the development of healthy minds and bodies.

How Do I Start?

Here are some steps to help you get started:

- **Plan ahead** – The school day already includes built-in structure (e.g., arrival, recess, lunch, dismissal). Choose one activity (e.g., first period, language arts) or transition (e.g., entering the classroom, getting ready for recess) to focus on. Break routines down step-by-step. For example, *arrival* might include: the bell rings -> line up at the door -> wait for the teacher -> walk in line to the classroom -> hang up backpack. Post a daily visual schedule on the whiteboard or other visible area.
- **Get students involved** – Ask students what they already know about the routine. This helps identify gaps and gives them ownership. As students grow, offer more choices within the routine to foster independence.
- **Be clear** – Ensure everyone knows what is expected. Use simple, consistent language.
- **Use visuals and timers** – These tools support understanding and time awareness, especially for younger students or those who benefit from visual structure.

The 4 Main Ingredients for Building Routines

1. **Consistency** – Repeating the same steps or activities in the same order each time builds familiarity.
2. **Predictability** – Helping students know what to expect. Predictability is the result of consistent routines.
3. **Follow-through** – Providing prompts, guidance, and support to help students complete each step of the routine.
4. **Praise** – Offering genuine, specific praise for completing steps encourages continued participation and builds confidence.

I've Started a Routine—Now What?

Congratulations! Once your routine has been in place for a few days or weeks, take time to reflect:

- How is it going? What's working well? What's still challenging?
- Is the routine predictable without being too rigid?
- Which parts can most students do independently? Where do they need more support?
- Can students help shape the routine? Involving them fosters ownership and engagement.

Independent Activity Schedules

What am I observing?

Do you have a student who...

- ☐ Waits for adult help before starting a task?
- ☐ Struggles to complete work unless someone is right beside them?
- ☐ Finds it hard to finish multi-step tasks?
- ☐ Has difficulty playing or working independently during free or quiet times?

What strategies can I try?

An activity schedule is a teaching tool designed to help students become more independent when completing meaningful tasks.

It is not:

- Just another visual schedule
- Only for students with autism
- Difficult to set up

What Is an Activity Schedule?

An activity schedule is an evidence-based teaching tool designed to help students complete tasks or sequences of tasks independently. It breaks down an activity into clear, manageable steps—using pictures, words, or both—and gradually fades prompts as the student gains confidence and skill.

Following an activity schedule is like using a checklist, a daily planner, or instructions to assemble furniture. The goal is to build independence in completing activities that are meaningful and appropriate to the student's abilities and developmental level.

The tasks chosen are tailored to each student's skills and needs. For example, a toddler might work on a shape sorter, while an older child might learn to pack their lunch or initiate social interactions. The number and detail of steps depend on what the student requires to successfully complete the activity.

For students struggling to follow checklists or daily agendas, teaching activity schedules can develop foundational skills essential for lifelong independence.

Key Features of Teaching with Activity Schedules:

- After the initial verbal instruction to start, no further verbal prompts are given by the teacher during the task.
- The teaching approach uses most-to-least prompting (also called "errorless learning") to guide the student smoothly, rather than trial-and-error
- or least-to-most prompting.

Prerequisite Skills

To be a good candidate for an activity schedule, a student should be able to:

- Distinguish picture from background — If the student is not yet reading, can they identify the main object in a picture separate from its background?
- Match identical objects — If shown a picture of an object, can the student find the same picture within a group of different images?
- Understand picture-object correspondence — Does the student recognize that a picture (photo or drawing) represents the real-life object?
- Be comfortable with manual guidance — Is the student okay with hand-over-hand physical assistance and able to follow hand gestures such as pointing?

Preparation Work

- Choose the activity or activities to include in the schedule. Select tasks that are meaningful and important to the student (e.g., building with LEGO bricks, completing worksheets, finding a friend to play Connect Four, doing household chores, or following a recipe).
- Take photos of each step in the activity. The number of steps will depend on the student's developmental level and ability to follow sequences.
- Create a dedicated binder for the activity schedule, including the step-by-step photos.
- Set up a designated space, such as a basket on a shelf or a table, where the binder and materials can be stored and accessed easily by the student.
- Have rewards ready for the student to choose from after completing the activity schedule. In some cases, the end product of the task (e.g., baked cookies) may serve as the reward.

Finally, remember to track the student's progress. This will help you adjust the activity schedule or expand it as the student builds independence.

Elopement

What am I observing?

Elopement occurs when a student leaves adult supervision or a designated, supervised area. It may present in different ways:

- ☐ **Wandering** without a clear or specific destination
- ☐ **Goal-directed movement** such as bolting, darting, or running toward a specific place, object, or highly preferred activity

What is Elopement? Elopement is a serious and potentially high-risk behaviour that can be very challenging for both educators and families to manage.

The information below offers general context and resources. However, to effectively support a student engaging in elopement, an individualized assessment and support plan is essential. Work with your school team to develop a tailored approach.

If elopement is occurring at school, it may also happen at home or in the community. This can be extremely stressful for families. Be sure to check in with caregivers to ensure they have access to the support and information they need.

What Is This Telling Me About the Student?

Making Sense of Elopement

Every child is unique, and students with developmental differences may experience challenges in areas such as learning, sensory processing, impulse control, body awareness, and autonomy. These factors can increase the likelihood of elopement.

For many students, elopement serves a purpose—a way to meet a need or avoid something undesirable. As discussed in the Functional Behaviour Assessment section, challenging behaviours often have a function. Understanding this can help us begin to answer important questions:

What is the function of the behaviour? What might the student be trying to gain or avoid? In school, this could mean escaping certain people, activities, or environments—or accessing preferred ones.

- When is elopement most and least likely to occur? What time of day or specific activities are associated with this behaviour?
- Which situations or settings is the student leaving?
- What seems to trigger stress, discomfort, or agitation?
- What brings the student joy, comfort, or visible happiness?

By exploring these questions with curiosity and empathy, we move closer to understanding the "why" behind elopement, and can begin developing safer, more supportive responses. The answers can serve as a starting point for preventing elopement. This involves creating a plan that includes clear, predictable expectations and routines, and identifying ways for the student to get what they need or want without eloping.

The plan should match the function of the behaviour. For example, if a student frequently leaves the classroom to play on the climber outside, we can explore ways to teach alternative methods for accessing it, such as asking verbally, using a visual choice board, or pointing to a picture of the climber.

Additionally, we can explore how to provide similar sensory or movement experiences in the classroom or gym. Once the student learns to access the climber appropriately and consistently, we can begin teaching waiting skills to help them tolerate short delays before accessing it.

What strategies can I try?

Prevention and General Ideas for Schools

Below is a partial list of strategies to prevent elopement in school settings. For a more comprehensive list, refer to the NAA (2017) report and the Big Red Safety Box publication in the Resources section.

- Consult with a Registered Behaviour Analyst or another professional trained in functional behaviour assessments (FBAs) and functional analyses (FAs). Work collaboratively with school administration to ensure a team-based approach to preventing elopement.
- Install child locks on exit doors (ensure compliance with local fire codes) and keep outdoor gates securely closed.
- Install alarms or bells on doors or other points of exit.
- Consider the use of a wearable location tracking device (with parent/guardian consent).
- Position the teacher's desk near the door.
- Position the student's workspace farther away from the exit.
- Assign 1:1 staff support as needed.
- Use visual cues, such as stop signs—explicitly teach their meaning to the student.
- Be especially prepared during high-transition times (e.g., recess, class changes); have a pre-assigned staff-student plan in place.
- Designate and teach the use of a "safe space" in the school.
- Provide calming tools and sensory supports. Consult with an Occupational Therapist if possible.
- Prepare a student profile sheet with an up-to-date photo and physical description.
- Share printed safety protocols with all caregivers (staff, volunteers, and parents).
- Ensure all staff are trained and aware of elopement protocols.
- If a student is missing, call 911 immediately.
- Search high-risk areas first, such as bodies of water, busy streets, or wooded areas.

Supporting Motor Skill Development

Supporting Motor Skill Development

What might I observe in a student with motor skill challenges?

- ☐ Appears awkward or uncoordinated in physical tasks (e.g., bumping into objects, struggling with balance, or having an unusual gait).
- ☐ Has difficulty learning or performing new motor-based tasks (e.g., specific gym drills).
- ☐ May avoid physical activities such as team sports, gym class, or hands-on tasks due to discomfort, fatigue, or past failures.
- ☐ Tires quickly during physical or written tasks, possibly reporting muscle fatigue or discomfort.
- ☐ Demonstrates poor posture during seated work (e.g., slouched or resting head on arms); may frequently shift position in attempts to get comfortable.
- ☐ Struggles with fine motor tasks such as printing legibly, drawing diagrams, using lab tools, or typing efficiently.
- ☐ Schoolwork may appear messy or inconsistent; difficulty with organizing written output within lines or keeping pace during note-taking.
- ☐ May appear disengaged or reluctant to participate in activities that highlight motor difficulties, potentially impacting peer relationships or self-confidence.

What is this telling me?

Several factors could account for the observations listed. It is important to consider how vision, sensory integration, sleep, nutrition, verbal and nonverbal reasoning skills, self-regulation, and a general lack of opportunity to practice certain motor skills may be influencing a student's presentation. It may also be helpful to consider one or more abilities related to motor skill development as potential explanations for the observed concerns. These insights can help inform the most effective support strategies.

Firstly, there may be factors related to muscle and joint development that impact motor skills in students. While physical activity at school can help build muscle strength and endurance, challenges such as low muscle tone, poor postural stability, or joint hypermobility may require assessment by a healthcare professional. To learn more, please refer to the section Supporting Motor Skill Development in the Early Years in the document titled "**Nurturing Strong Roots: Practical Supports for Early Learners**."

What strategies can I try?

Supporting the Development of an Efficient Pencil Grasp

An inefficient pencil grasp can sometimes occur when a student is encouraged to use a mature grasp before they are physically ready. Regardless of a student's age, revisiting the typical progression of pencil grasp development—from palmar grasp, to digital pronate, to static tripod, and finally to a mature dynamic tripod grasp—can help build the muscle strength and coordination needed for efficient handwriting.

An effective pencil grasp can support improved legibility, increased writing speed, and reduced hand fatigue and discomfort during writing tasks.

Strategies to Support the Development of a Mature Pencil Grasp:

- **Build core and upper body strength.** Strength in the trunk, shoulders, and arms provides the stability needed to support fine motor control in the hands and fingers. Activities such as yoga, animal walks, wall push-ups, or classroom chores that involve lifting or carrying can be helpful.
- **Strengthen the muscles in the hands and fingers.** Use materials like therapy putty, stress balls, or clothespins. Other options include cutting thick materials (e.g., cardstock), using eyedroppers for art or science tasks, or using spray bottles to water plants or clean surfaces.
- **Encourage fine motor activities with small parts.** Games and tasks like sorting math manipulatives, playing card games, Connect Four, pegboard designs, puzzles, or beading can improve dexterity. Start with larger objects and gradually move to smaller, more precise items as skills develop.
- **Provide pencil control practice.** Engaging activities like mazes, dot-to-dot drawings, tracing shapes or stencils, and word searches can help students improve pencil control in a fun and meaningful way.
- **Consider pencil grips or adapted tools if needed.** Some students may benefit from specialized grips or modified writing tools. Since there are many types available, it's best to consult with an occupational therapist to determine what, if any, adaptations are most appropriate for the student.

Written Work and Testing Accommodations

Motor differences and hand fatigue can impact both the legibility of written work and a student's ability to complete assignments or demonstrate their knowledge during assessments. Accommodations can support students in accessing the curriculum and demonstrating their learning effectively.

Possible accommodations include:

- Allowing additional time for written assignments and tests
- Breaking long writing tasks or assessments into manageable sections
- Incorporating frequent breaks to rest and stretch the hands and fingers
- Reducing writing and copying demands by offering printed handouts or access to a computer
- Modifying test formats by offering alternatives such as multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank formats, point-form answers, scribing support, take-home tests, or allowing students to supplement written responses with oral explanations or use of technology

Keyboarding as an Alternative Tool

Keyboarding is a vital life skill, especially for students with motor challenges that affect handwriting. As academic expectations increase, typing can become a more efficient and less physically demanding method for completing written tasks.

Supportive strategies include:

- Providing regular opportunities to practice keyboarding to improve speed and accuracy
- Teaching traditional touch-typing techniques (e.g., home-row method), which can help establish more automatic and efficient typing habits
- Using structured, developmentally appropriate programs (e.g., Keyboarding Without Tears) to support keyboarding instruction

Note: For students with motor coordination challenges or learning differences, traditional typing methods may be difficult. These students may benefit from support in developing a personalized and functional keyboarding method that works best for them. When using a keyboard as a tool for writing and assessment, the focus should be on the content, not the specific technique.

When to Seek Additional Support

If you suspect that motor skill challenges may be linked to underlying vision issues, encourage caregivers to consult with an optometrist for a comprehensive eye exam.

If concerns relate to muscle tone, postural stability, joint hypermobility, or other physical development factors, it is recommended to discuss with caregivers the option of seeking support from a physician, occupational therapist, or physiotherapist.

Finally, if you have tried implementing the suggested strategies, along with other recommendations or supports available within your school, but difficulties with motor skill development persist, it may be appropriate to consider formal assessment and therapy.

In school settings:

- Occupational therapists typically support students with fine motor challenges or sensory-based motor difficulties.
- Physiotherapists focus on gross motor skills, mobility, and musculoskeletal concerns.

Referral to therapy can be especially important for students with joint hypermobility, as therapists can work to strengthen supporting muscles and recommend external supports where appropriate. Occupational and physical therapists can also help identify signs of low muscle tone that may be contributing to ongoing motor skill challenges.

Speech & Language

Supporting Speech & Language Development

Supporting Speech & Language Development

As a classroom teacher, you are in a unique position to observe your student's academic, social, and functional language skills. When a student is struggling in the classroom, their difficulties may be linked to a variety of factors. This reference guide is designed to help you support students with a range of speech and language concerns.

Speech: Articulation and Stuttering

What am I observing?

You may notice a student who:

- ☐ Has more than three sound errors in their speech beyond the expected developmental age.
- ☐ Demonstrates phonological processes such as:
  - Final consonant deletion (e.g., saying "ca" for "cat")
  - Backing (e.g., using "k" or "g" instead of "t" or "d")
  - Fronting (e.g., using "t" or "d" instead of "k" or "g")
  - Assimilation (e.g., "gog" for "dog")
  - Blend reduction (e.g., "kunk" for "skunk")
  - Syllable deletion in multi-syllabic words (e.g., "efant" for "elephant")
- ☐ Presents with stuttering behaviors, including:
  - Blocks (pauses where no sound comes out)
  - A high frequency of sound, syllable, or word repetitions
  - Visible tension or struggle while speaking

What is this telling me?

Any of the listed observations may indicate difficulties related to articulation or stuttering, which may require additional support. Students with persisting speech or articulation challenges often benefit from explicit instructions on how to produce specific sounds, typically provided by a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).

Similarly, students who experience significant stuttering or anxiety around speaking can be taught evidence-based strategies by an SLP to help improve their fluency and communication confidence.

As a classroom teacher, understanding the possible reasons behind articulation errors or stuttering events empowers you to adjust your interactions and teaching strategies to better support these students.

Articulation

A child's speech typically develops naturally over time as they progress through school. Speech errors are often developmentally appropriate during early childhood, as the articulators (tongue, teeth, lips and jaw) are still maturing and becoming more coordinated in their movements.

However, when speech errors persist beyond the expected developmental age, it may indicate a speech sound disorder. These disorders can be categorized into various subtypes (e.g., articulation disorder, phonological disorder, motor speech disorders). For the purpose of this resource, we won't cover each in detail but will instead provide general guidelines on what to look for and when to refer a student for further evaluation.

Be mindful of how bilingualism may impact a student's articulation. If a particular sound does not exist in a student's first language, they may have more difficulty producing that sound in English. This is because we develop the ability to produce the sounds of our native language(s) early in life, and do not typically acquire unfamiliar sounds from other languages without targeted exposure or instruction.

- **For example**, there are approximately 70 different Indigenous languages spoken across Canada, grouped into 12 language families, each with its own unique set of speech sounds. Anishinaabemowin, for instance, includes 18 consonant sounds and 7 vowel sounds, whereas English has 25 consonant sounds and 19 vowel sounds.

Collaborating with caregivers to better understand which sounds are familiar or unfamiliar to their child can help ensure your approach is culturally responsive and appropriate.

For additional information on distinguishing language differences from language disorders, please refer to the An Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics handbook.

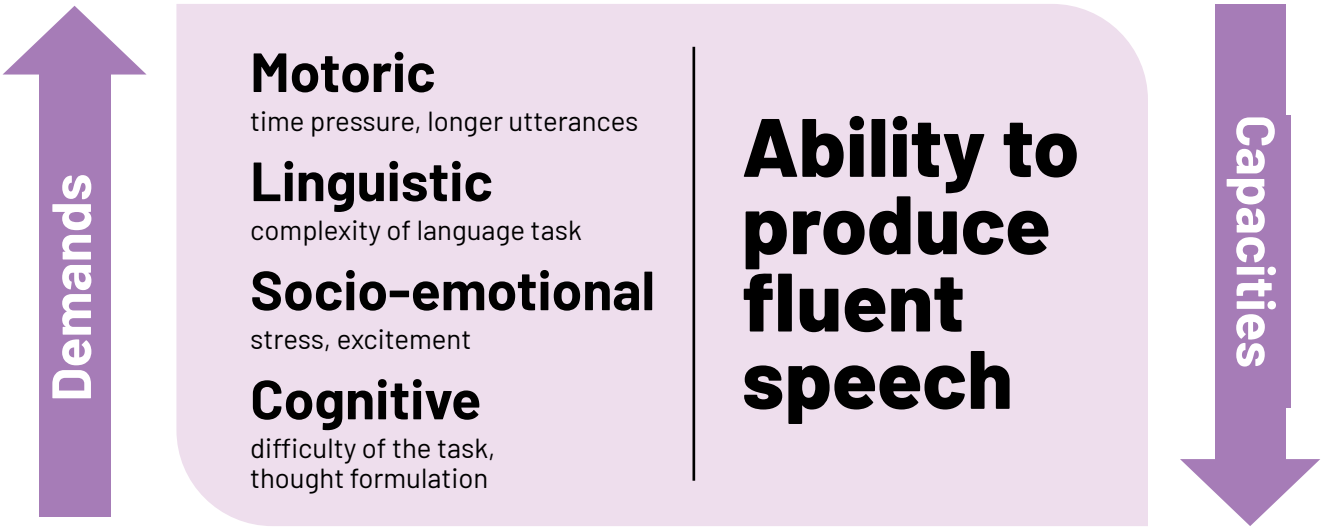
Stuttering

Stuttering is a natural part of communication that everyone experiences occasionally, such as repeating a word when tired or using filler words like "um". In younger children, developmental stuttering may occur during periods of rapid language growth. This type of stuttering is typically short-term and resolves on its own.

Disordered stuttering, however, is more persistent and is characterized by:

- Blocks (inability to get a sound out)
- Repetitions (e.g., "ba-ba-ball")
- Prolongations (e.g., "ssssssnake") that are longer or more frequent than what is typical in developmental stuttering

Stuttering can vary depending on the situation and is often worsened by increased demands, anxiety, or pressure.



What strategies can I try?

Articulation

Producing speech sounds is a complex motor skill that develops in stages. In speech therapy, children work through a hierarchy, from isolated sounds to words, phrases, sentences, and finally spontaneous speech. It's important to support them at the level they are currently working on.

- Support practice at the child's current level (e.g., word lists, sound-focused activities).
- Pair students to practice target words or find their target sounds in reading materials.
- Avoid correcting articulation in front of the class.
- Avoid expecting correct production during spontaneous speech if the child is only working at the word or phrase level.

Stuttering

To support fluency in the classroom:

- Slow your own speech rate, students naturally mirror the pace of their communication partners.
- Reduce the demands, simplify tasks and language complexity to lower speaking pressure.
- Give students extra time to respond
  - Use more comments and fewer direct questions
  - Pause frequently in your own speech
- Collaborate with caregivers, learn what helps the student feel more fluent and confident.
- Create a safe, supportive environment, encourage open dialogue and build trust
- Avoid saying
  - "Slow down"
  - "Take a breath"
  - Finishing sentences for the child

These responses, while well-intended, are not supported by research and may increase anxiety.

When do I go get more help?

If a student presents with more than three articulation errors or ongoing stuttering behaviors, they may be eligible for publicly funded articulation and fluency support from a speech-language pathologist. Speak with the family to share your observations and obtain consent for a referral. Classroom teachers can initiate referrals through your school board's Speech and Language Services.

Expressive & Receptive Language

What am I observing?

You may notice a student who:

- ☐ Does not use full sentences and speaks in telegraphic speech (e.g., "want cookie" instead of "I want a cookie").
- ☐ Uses very simple sentences and rarely includes conjunctions (e.g., "and," "because," "but").
- ☐ Has difficulty telling a personal narrative or retelling a story; their stories are hard to follow, lack cohesion, and are missing several key story grammar elements.
- ☐ Struggles to recall words or remember curriculum content.
- ☐ Has trouble making connections between words, concepts, and ideas.
- ☐ Rarely participates in circle time or whole-group discussions.
- ☐ Has difficulty following directions and appears unable to complete tasks without additional support.
- ☐ Performs well in group settings but struggles with independent tasks.

What is this telling me?

These observations may suggest that your student is experiencing challenges with receptive and/or expressive language skills, which can significantly impact their academic and social success.

For a deeper understanding of the cognitive foundations of verbal and nonverbal language skills, please refer to the **Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics handbook**.

This section uses a few important terms to describe different areas of language development.

- Expressive language is how a person uses words to communicate, usually through speaking. It includes:
  - Vocabulary (the words they use)
  - Grammar and sentence structure
  - Morphology (using parts of words like prefixes and suffixes)
- Receptive language is how a person understands spoken language. It includes:
  - Following directions
  - Understanding vocabulary
  - Making connections between words, concepts, and ideas
  - Understanding stories and conversations
- Narrative language is the ability to understand and tell a complete, logical story. A strong narrative includes:
  - Characters, setting, and emotions
  - A clear beginning, middle, and end
  - Cause-and-effect relationships and a conclusion
- Higher-level language includes thinking and reasoning skills such as:
  - Making inferences
  - Predicting what will happen next
  - Problem-solving and explaining ideas

What strategies can I try?

The language you use in your classroom plays a crucial role in students' language development—not just vocabulary, but also grammar and overall communication skills. The more exposure students have to academic vocabulary, the greater their success in reading and overall academic achievement. Children with language deficits often need explicit instruction and repeated exposure to develop their skills.

- Explicit Instruction Strategies
- Use direct, clear instructions for students with language difficulties.
- Support early learners by incorporating:
  - Home languages
  - Visuals
  - Hands-on activities
  - Movement-based learning
- Provide small group instruction to review:
  - Challenging vocabulary
  - Key concepts in a more focused setting
- Be aware that some students may struggle with inferred steps in instructions and may need to be explicitly taught or modeled. For example, a task like "Read chapter 6 and define the following vocabulary items" assumes the student knows to:

Step 1: Get the textbook

Step 2: Find chapter 6 (e.g., page 52)

Step 3: Read the section

Step 4: Locate the vocabulary words

Step 5: Define the words in their own language

Teach Story Grammar Elements

Explicitly teaching story grammar can significantly improve students' narrative skills and working memory.

- Use graphic organizers to scaffold story structure.
- These help students understand:
  - What to pay attention to in a story
  - How stories are organized
  - How to retell or create their own stories
- Common story grammar elements include:
  - Characters
  - Setting
  - Emotions
  - Problem (initiating event)
  - Actions
  - Resolution
  - Ending/Conclusion
- Providing a consistent structure reduces cognitive load and helps students become more confident storytellers and listeners.

Shared Reading

- Shared reading has strong evidence supporting its effectiveness in improving vocabulary and literacy skills.
- Introduce key vocabulary words before reading to support both expressive and receptive language development.
- If possible, review pictures or diagrams ahead of time and ask students to predict story elements or concepts based on the visuals.
- After reading, ask casual questions (e.g., "Why did that happen?" or "What caused that?") to help students make connections and strengthen both auditory and reading comprehension (van den Broek et al., 2011).

At-Home Strategies

- Provide families with vocabulary words, stories, or classroom concepts being taught. This allows families to use their own language, knowledge, and experiences to enrich the learning environment.
- Share story grammar resources with caregivers so they can practice these skills using familiar stories, helping children transfer that knowledge to new texts.
- Encourage family involvement as a way to bridge home languages and cultures with classroom learning, supporting more holistic and inclusive development.



Visual supports from Gillam et al., presented at the ASHA Convention (2018), offer helpful illustrations for each story grammar element.

When do I go get more help?

If a student continues to struggle with language despite classroom support, they may have a Specific Language Impairment (SLI) or a Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). In such cases, a referral for an assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist is recommended.

It's also important to consider whether the student is bilingual or multilingual. Their language abilities may be stronger in their home language than in English. Refer to the section on language differences in the **An Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics** handbook to help determine whether the student is experiencing a language disorder or is simply still acquiring English.

Phonological Awareness and Reading

What am I observing?

- ☐ A student who relies heavily on visuals and pictures while reading.
- ☐ A student whose grades decline significantly in Grade 4 compared with previous years.
- ☐ A student who has difficulty sounding out words and struggles with unfamiliar vocabulary.
- ☐ A student who often substitutes words while reading, choosing ones with the same initial sound or syllable instead of the correct word.
- ☐ A student who consistently makes vowel errors beyond what is typical for their age.
- ☐ A student with highly unintelligible speech or a history of significant speech-sound delays.
- ☐ A student who can sound out words, but does so slowly and with great effort, often forgetting the beginning of the sentence by the time they reach the end, resulting in poor reading fluency.

What is this telling me?

Children with highly unintelligible speech are at increased risk for reading difficulties due to challenges in connecting sounds to letters. Because they are unable to accurately produce many speech sounds, they may develop "fuzzy" internal representations of those sounds, making it difficult to associate them with corresponding letters.

Parental difficulty with reading is also strongly correlated with a child's reading challenges. If you suspect a student may have reading difficulties or dyslexia, it can be helpful to ask caregivers about their own reading history to help determine whether a referral for additional support is appropriate.

Some children rely heavily on visual information when reading, focusing more on inference than on decoding. Around Grade 4, when the academic shift occurs from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," these students may begin to fall behind, as texts provide fewer visual supports (Chall, 1983). In such cases, further assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist or Psychologist may be beneficial to better understand the student's learning needs and provide targeted intervention.

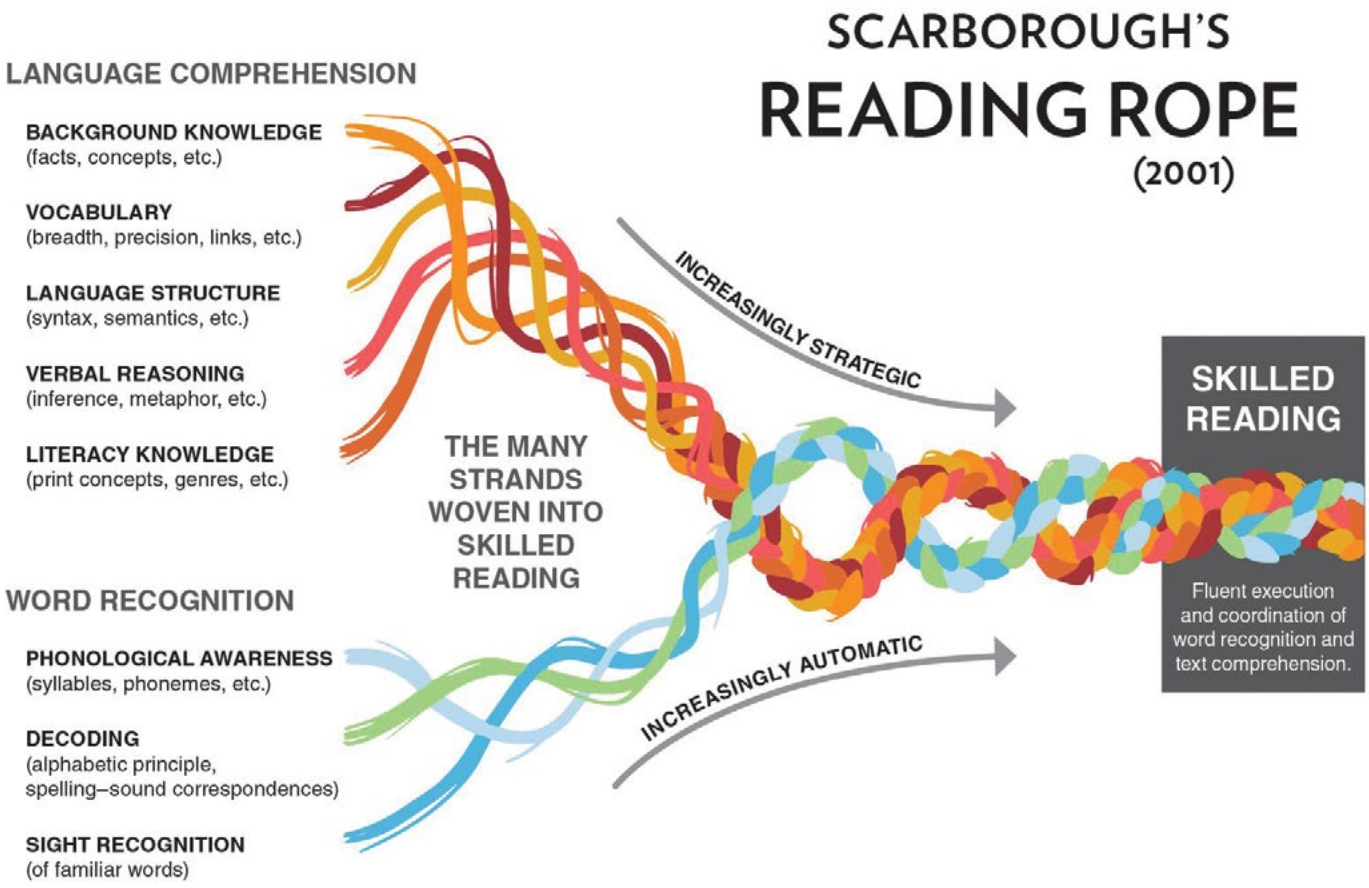
What Does the Skill of Reading Entail?

Reading is a complex skill that involves multiple components working together and is a strong predictor of academic success throughout school. The most effective way to support a student's reading abilities depends on which specific aspects of reading they find challenging.

A helpful framework for understanding reading is Scarborough's Reading Rope model. This model describes two intertwined strands that must work together for fluent reading: language comprehension and word recognition.

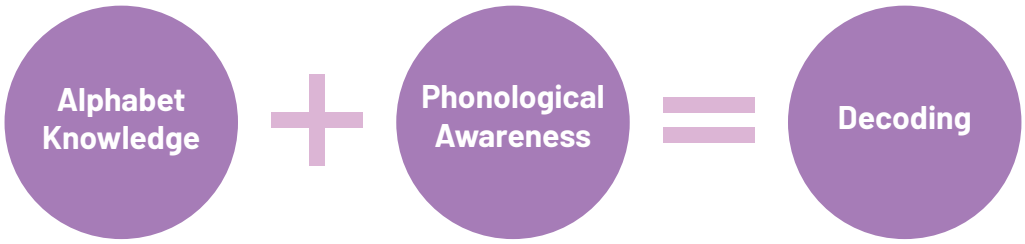
Language comprehension includes understanding vocabulary, language structure, inference, and background knowledge.

Word recognition refers to what many people typically associate with reading, our ability to decode or sound out words, phonological awareness, and sight word recognition. When teaching reading, it is important to monitor and support both strands to help students become skilled readers. This section will focus on the word recognition strand. For strategies related to language comprehension, please refer to the previous section.



Phonological awareness is the ability to hear, recognize, and manipulate the sounds in spoken language. It is a critical skill for learning to read and write in any alphabetic writing system. Phonological awareness encompasses several abilities, including an Individual's capacity to do the following:

- Blend sounds or syllables together to form words.
- Count the number of syllables in a word (syllable awareness).
- Recognize alliteration (words that begin with the same sound).
- Segment (break apart) a sentence into words or a word into individual sounds.
- Identify individual sounds (phonemes) in a word.
- Recognize and produce rhyming words.



Decoding individual words combines phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. When teaching decoding, children learn to hear the sounds that make up words and understand which letters represent those sounds. To decode a new word, they see the letters, say the sounds aloud, blend the sounds together, and then recognize and connect meaning to the word they have produced.

To spell, or encode, students must hear the word, segment it into individual sounds, and write the corresponding letters for each sound.

Sight words require memorization of irregular spelling patterns. As readers become more skilled, more words become sight words, students recognize the word's shape and automatically know what it says. This reduces the cognitive load of re ading because they no longer need to sound out every word, making reading a more automatic and fluent process.

In the earlier elementary grades, it is critical that students develop a solid understanding of alphabet principles and strong phonological awareness skills, as phonological awareness is one of the strongest predictors of academic success. In later grades, the focus shifts more toward vocabulary development. Therefore, it is important to ensure that students in early elementary grades have strong phonological awareness skills and identify those who need additional support for appropriate referrals.

What strategies can I try?

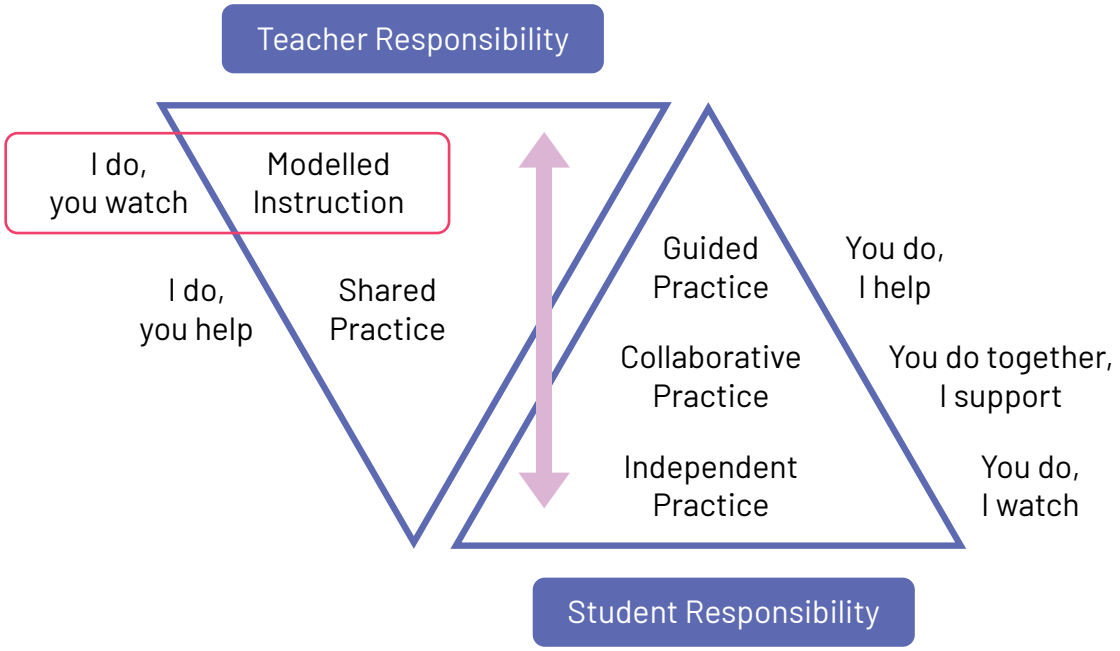
Many variables can impact a child's ability to learn to read. Different learning strategies and modalities will help different students acquire these skills. If you have a student in later grades who is still struggling with reading, ensuring they have a strong understanding of phonological awareness is critical to their instruction. Please see the Early Childhood manual for additional information and strategies on phonological awareness instruction.

Explicit Morphological Instruction

- Teach suffixes and prefixes explicitly. This supports vocabulary development and helps students recognize meaningful chunks and letter patterns. For example, the suffix "-tion" is not easily decodable, but once students recognize it automatically, the cognitive load required to decode words containing it decreases. Learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes also helps expand students' vocabulary, enabling them to infer the meaning of new words from context.
- Use engaging activities such as word sorts, scavenger hunts in books, magazines, or online resources, creating anchor charts, and word-building games with prefixes, roots, and suffixes (with a point system). These support a variety of learning styles beyond traditional testing.

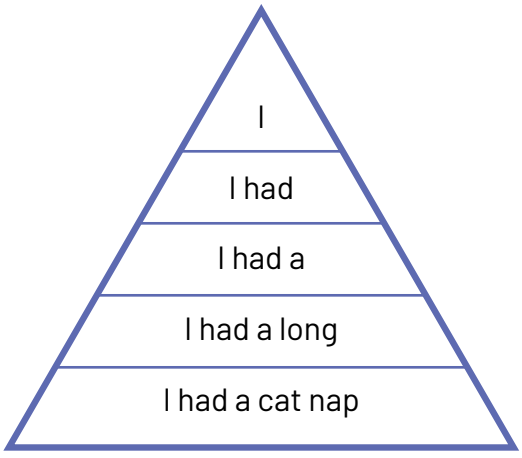
Building Fluency

- Use the *Gradual Release of Responsibility Model* to help build fluency with struggling readers. (Fisher and Frey, 2007).
- This model guides reading instruction by gradually moving learners toward independence.
- Learners may move back and forth between phases as they develop skills and strategies.
- Spend additional time with struggling readers, collaborating and explaining processes to help them connect meaning with decoding and support working memory.



Phonics or Decodable Fluency Pyramids are another effective tool for teaching reading fluency.

- Gradually increase the number of words by adding one new word at a time, until the student can read the entire sentence.
- These pyramids help students retain previously learned information and build fluency.



At home strategies

- If parents also struggle with reading, sharing this with their child can foster acceptance, understanding, and confidence in working on reading skills.
- Encourage families to notice that written language is everywhere and point out high-frequency sight words, familiar letters, or symbols on signs, labels, or store names.
- Suggest that families play phonological awareness games and read regularly at home with their child.
- Encourage families to create three piles of books for reading at home:

  Pile 1: Books the child can read independently without help, including simple or highly familiar books they have memorized.

  Pile 2: Books at the child's current reading level that require some support to read.

  Pile 3: Books that parents read to their child, which are at the child's comprehension level and cover motivating topics or genres.
- Audiobooks and story-based podcasts are excellent tools to help students access stories and build narrative skills and comprehension.
- Watching a movie adaptation of a book before reading it can support students' understanding by providing context and visual cues that enhance comprehension.
- Identify a few words the student can read independently and involve them in a shared reading activity, where they read those words while you read the rest. This builds confidence and reinforces word recognition.

When should I seek additional support?

A referral for reading support or an assessment is highly recommended for students who continue to struggle with decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension. If a student's reading difficulties persist despite the use of targeted strategies, they may benefit from an assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist or a psychoeducational assessment conducted by a psychologist to identify any underlying diagnoses that may be impacting their learning. Specialized reading tutors may also provide valuable support for these students.

A Note on Hyperlexia

Hyperlexia is when a child demonstrates advanced decoding skills and can read well above their grade level; however, their comprehension is significantly below the level at which they are reading. These children may go unidentified because, orally, they can read fluently and appear highly proficient. Difficulties may become more apparent around Grade 4, when the focus shifts from learning to read to reading to learn.

If you suspect that a child in your class may be hyperlexic, a referral to a speech-language pathologist or psychologist is appropriate. In the classroom, support should focus on strengthening the student's auditory and reading comprehension, as well as building vocabulary and morphology skills.

Symbol Use in the Classroom

What am I observing?

- ☐ Students who are very difficult to understand when speaking.
- ☐ Students who have significant difficulty finding the right words and use very short sentences.
- ☐ Students who speak very little or not at all at school but are reported to speak at home.

What is this telling me?

Your student may benefit from using an alternative communication system, such as symbols, to support their communication needs.

You may encounter the term Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) when discussing symbol-based communication. AAC refers to tools and strategies used by individuals who need support to make their speech clearer or who require another way to communicate when spoken language is limited or unclear.

Different types of AAC are commonly used in classrooms to support students:

- **No-tech systems:** such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and communication boards
- **Low-tech systems:** such as battery-operated speech-generating devices (SGDs) and single-message buttons
- **High-tech systems:** such as apps on tablets or dedicated speech-generating devices

AAC also includes sign language and written text, but this section will focus on symbol-based communication.

Students who may benefit from symbol-based AAC include:

Complex Communicators
You may have children in your classroom who are minimally verbal due to genetic conditions, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and/or seizure disorders. With support, these children can use symbol-based language to communicate their wants, needs, and even complex thoughts and ideas. Depending on their motor and cognitive abilities, different types of AAC may be appropriate for different students. A speech-language pathologist can help determine the most suitable tool for each individual child.

Selective Mutism
AAC may help students with selective mutism feel more comfortable communicating outside the home. However, AAC may not be effective for all students with selective mutism, and additional interventions or tools may be more appropriate in some cases.

Individuals with Significant Speech Sound Disorders
Children whose speech is very difficult to understand may benefit from AAC to help others better comprehend their messages. Depending on their individual needs, they may benefit from a low-tech topic board, a letter board, or a high-tech system to support communication and improve social interactions.

Individuals with Word-Finding Difficulties
Children who struggle to find the right words may benefit from symbol-based communication, as the visual structure and organization of the device can help support a broader and more expressive vocabulary.

Children with Social-Pragmatic Challenges Children who have difficulty with social communication may benefit from symbol-based AAC to help them initiate and maintain conversations, stay on topic, and engage in more meaningful interactions with peers and adults.

What strategies can I try?

Aided Language and Modeling

In order for children to use their AAC systems effectively and accurately, it is essential to model the communication we want to see. *Aided Language Stimulation* is a strategy used to teach individuals how to use their AAC system. While speaking verbally to the child, we also point to the corresponding symbols on their device. This pairing of spoken language with visual symbols helps the AAC user learn what the symbols represent and where to find them.

If we only speak to a child who uses symbol-based communication, simply because they understand verbal language, we are expecting them to use a system expressively without first showing them how it works. The graphic below, from Gayle Porter, illustrates the importance of the relationship between the input a student receives and the output we expect.

Spoken Language Development



Aided Language Development



Aim for Student using Aided Language



When do I go get more help?

If you have a student who you believe may benefit from the use of AAC, it may be appropriate to consult with your school board's speech-language pathologist about a referral to the nearest AAC clinic in Ontario. Be sure to discuss the referral with the family to obtain their consent.

Supporting Cognitive Skills in the Classroom

Supporting Cognitive Skills in the Classroom

Verbal Reasoning Skills

What am I observing?

Any of the following observations may indicate verbal reasoning difficulties that require support:

- ☐ Limited speech.
- ☐ Does not appear to recognize, understand, or use words you would expect them to know.
- ☐ Struggles to express themselves verbally and may rely on high-valence language (e.g., swearing) or repeated scripts (e.g., "I'm thinking about it," "I'll do it later," "Leave me alone") to mask confusion.
- ☐ Becomes easily confused, frustrated, or upset when there is a lot of talking.
- ☐ Shuts down in response to excessive verbal input.
- ☐ More likely to express themselves nonverbally (e.g., gesturing, physical aggression) or remain silent.
- ☐ Appears to rely on nonverbal cues to support comprehension (e.g., gestures, images, context) rather than verbal instructions or prompts.
- ☐ Has difficulty understanding, initiating, or persisting through verbally-based tasks (e.g., reading and writing activities).
- ☐ Speaks slowly, takes longer to generate verbal responses (oral or written), and completes literacy tasks at a slower pace.
- ☐ Does not appear to listen or attend during class.
- ☐ Struggles to sound out words, read fluently, and spell accurately.
- ☐ Resists reading aloud.
- ☐ Cannot remember what they have read or heard.
- ☐ Has difficulty following verbal instructions and often seems forgetful.
- ☐ Consistently receives low grades in subjects that rely heavily on reading, writing, and verbal memory (e.g., English, History).

What is this telling me?

Several factors may account for the observations listed. Most importantly, it is essential to consider the impact of hearing difficulties on language development, as well as the various speech and language challenges discussed in earlier sections of this book.

It may also be helpful to consider one or more of the following subdomains of verbal reasoning abilities as potential explanations for the concerns observed. Sometimes, speech and language difficulties interfere with the development of verbal reasoning skills. In other cases, students may struggle with verbal reasoning despite having age-appropriate speech and vocabulary.

Verbal reasoning refers to the ability to understand, analyze, and logically work with language-based information. This includes interpreting written and spoken words, identifying relationships between concepts, and solving problems. Verbal reasoning is made up of several subdomains, and it is important to note that students may show strengths in some areas while needing support in others.

Subdomains of Verbal Reasoning Ability

- **Verbal Comprehension:**
  Refers to the ability to identify verbal concepts, use language to problem-solve and reason, define words, and express acquired verbal knowledge. Verbal comprehension supports understanding what others say, reading comprehension, and the ability to find the right words to express ideas. Students with difficulties in this area may rely more heavily on nonverbal communication (e.g., gestures, images, contextual cues).
- **Receptive Vocabulary:**
  Students may have difficulty understanding individual words, which can interfere with overall comprehension. (*See prior section on Expressive and Receptive Language.*)
- **Expressive Vocabulary:**
  Students may lack the vocabulary to clearly express themselves, making it difficult to communicate knowledge or convey complete ideas. Importantly, a student with expressive vocabulary challenges may still appear talkative, they may simply have a limited pool of words to draw from. (*See prior section on Expressive and Receptive Language.*)
- **Listening Comprehension:**
  This refers to the ability to understand and answer questions about information presented orally. Weak listening comprehension can affect a student's ability to follow class discussions and oral instructions. It may be impacted by limited vocabulary, other language difficulties, and/or attention challenges. In particular, students with attention difficulties may miss important information and appear to have listening comprehension issues. (*See section on Executive Function, Attention, and Hyperactivity.*)
- **Oral Fluency:**
  Describes how quickly and efficiently a student can generate language and verbal ideas. Some students may require more time than their peers to produce speech, which could be due to slower processing speed, difficulty retrieving words, limited vocabulary, or articulation challenges.
- **Phonological Processing:**
  Refers to the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of words (e.g., phonics). A student may understand phonics but struggle to apply this knowledge efficiently or hold it in working memory while decoding unfamiliar words. (*See prior section on Phonological Processing.*)
- **Verbal Memory:**
  Students may have difficulty storing verbal information, especially if they do not fully understand it, or organizing it in a way that supports easy recall later. They may also struggle to hold verbal information in working memory when answering questions or solving problems on the spot.

What strategies can I try?

There are many modifications that can be made to teaching style, classroom tasks, and assessments, as well as technology and formal supports that can be implemented to assist students with verbal reasoning difficulties. Some examples include:

Simplify Communication and Language Demands

- Use simple and concrete vocabulary whenever possible
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Reduce the amount of oral information shared at once; break it into manageable chunks
- Allow the student to read and speak at their own pace
- Provide extra time for the student to formulate a response
- Ask questions that require shorter, more direct answers
- Ensure the student is paying attention before delivering important information

Use Varied Approaches to Support Comprehension

- Rephrase questions or instructions in different ways
- Offer response options (e.g., multiple choice, yes/no)
- Check for understanding (e.g., ask the student to explain what they understood before moving on)
- Provide individualized instruction with visuals or demonstrations
- Incorporate repetition as needed
- Focus on functional reading skills, especially for older students

Increase Use of Visuals and Nonverbal Strategies

- Use visual aids and hands-on demonstrations
- Offer nonverbal methods for students to learn and show what they know
- Build vocabulary through visual games and matching activities
- Allow students to submit written work in place of oral presentations
- Use graphic organizers to support reading comprehension and verbal expression

Provide Reference Resources

- Supply vocabulary lists with pictures
- Allow access to recorded lessons for later review
- Provide written notes or reference materials for key concepts

Use Technology and Targeted Intervention

- Implement phonics-based interventions
- Use speech-to-text or text-to-speech tools (with appropriate training and support)
- Allow access to assistive features such as spell check

When should I get more help?

If a student is significantly behind their peers in speech and language development, has notable articulation difficulties that interfere with how well they are understood, or is refusing to speak, it is recommended that you seek additional support.

Furthermore, if you have already tried implementing the strategies outlined, as well as other recommendations or supports available at your school, but the difficulties persist, it may be time to consider the following potential explanations that require professional support:

- **Health Concerns:**
  The student may have a vision or hearing difference that interferes with their ability to see written text or hear oral information. Referrals should be made to a physician, optometrist, or audiologist as appropriate.
- **Speech Concerns:**
  The student may have difficulties with speech production for a variety of reasons. These concerns may benefit from assessment and intervention by a speech-language pathologist.
- **Mental Health Concerns**:
  Emotional or mental health challenges—such as anxiety, selective mutism, depression, trauma, or psychosis—can affect a student's ability to attend to, process, and use verbal information. If the student is also showing signs of emotional distress (e.g., frequently upset, anxious, withdrawn, or explosive), it may be appropriate to consult a physician or a mental health counselor, depending on the resources available in your community.
- **Neurodevelopmental Conditions:**
  The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, language disorder, learning disability, or intellectual disability) that affects how they process information and use language. If this is suspected, a psychological assessment may be recommended. For more information, please refer to the **An Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics** handbook.

Nonverbal Reasoning Skills

What am I observing?

Any of the following classroom observations may indicate nonverbal reasoning difficulties that require support:

- ☐ Difficulty in subjects that require abstract or quantitative reasoning, such as math and science.
- ☐ Trouble making conceptual links between ideas or recognizing patterns.
- ☐ Challenges with everyday tasks that require nonverbal reasoning, such as budgeting, understanding money, measuring, estimating, cooking, baking, and telling time.
- ☐ Appears clumsy or uncoordinated.
- ☐ Struggles with tasks requiring visual-motor integration, such as writing, drawing, copying from the board, building, arranging objects in space, or other fine motor tasks.
- ☐ Difficulty with everyday visual-spatial tasks, such as following directions, understanding spatial relationships, or using visual information to solve problems or communicate.
- ☐ Frequently misses or overlooks visual details.
- ☐ Becomes overwhelmed by too much visual information.
- ☐ Has difficulty identifying which visual information is relevant and which is irrelevant.

What is this telling me?

Several factors beyond strengths or support needs in nonverbal skills could account for the observations listed. However, it may be helpful to consider one or more of the following subdomains of nonverbal reasoning ability as potential explanations for concerning observations.

Nonverbal reasoning refers to the ability to understand and analyze visual information, recognize patterns, and solve problems without relying on language. There are many subdomains of nonverbal reasoning, and it is important to note that students may demonstrate strengths in some areas while needing support in others.

Subdomains of Nonverbal Reasoning Ability

- **Fluid Reasoning:**
  The student may have difficulty with abstract problem-solving, inductive and deductive reasoning, and pattern recognition. These challenges can interfere with conceptual thinking and problem-solving, especially in math and science, and may also impact reading comprehension and written expression.
- **Quantitative Reasoning:**
  The student may show reduced ease with numbers and numerical problem-solving, whether in the form of word problems or visual representations. Quantitative reasoning affects math performance and the application of math skills in daily life—such as budgeting, understanding money, measuring, estimating, and cooking/baking.
- **Visual-Spatial Reasoning:**
  The student may struggle to understand spatial relationships and visual layouts. They may have difficulty with hands-on tasks, creating visual designs, or solving puzzles that require mental or physical manipulation of space.
- **Visual-Motor Integration:**
  The student may have challenges with visual perception, motor coordination, or integrating the two. This can impact their ability to write, draw, build, or complete fine motor tasks. These difficulties may also affect everyday activities such as tying shoelaces, getting dressed, and attending to visual details.
- **Visual Memory:**
  The student may have difficulty storing visual information in memory, particularly if they cannot distinguish between relevant and irrelevant visual details. They may also struggle to organize visual information in a way that allows for efficient recall, and may find it difficult to hold visual information in working memory to solve problems or answer questions in real time.

What strategies can I try?

There are many modifications that can be made to teaching style, classwork, and assessments, as well as technological and formal supports that can be implemented to assist students with nonverbal reasoning difficulties. Some examples include:

Use Strategies to Make Content More Concrete (and Less Abstract):

- Make activities hands-on rather than purely mental
- Use concrete explanations and clear, straightforward language
- Provide additional instruction for conceptual learning and reasoning tasks
- Offer work samples or exemplars
- Break down complex concepts into manageable parts
- Use manipulatives and tactile materials
- Teach practical, real-world daily living skills
- Use examples that are meaningful and relatable to the student

Reduce and/or Simplify Visuals:

- Block out irrelevant visuals or text
- Highlight key visuals or essential text
- Encourage students to use highlighters when reading
- Provide graph paper or wide-ruled paper for better spatial organization
- Give verbal instructions alongside visuals
- Provide narration or explanation for visual presentations
- Offer the option of oral presentations instead of visual-based assessments

Provide Reference Materials and Additional Support:

- Provide math tables, formula sheets, or "cheat sheets"
- Allow extra time on tests and assignments
- Offer additional instruction (e.g., 1:1 support, small group teaching, or tutoring) for math and reasoning concepts
- Incorporate gamified math and science programs to enhance engagement

Provide Technology and Writing Supports:

- Offer access to text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools (with training)
- Provide a note-taker or allow dictation to a scribe
- Give printed or digital copies of notes
- Allow the use of a computer for writing tasks
- Teach and encourage typing skills

When should I get more help?

If a student shows significant delays in visual processing skills compared to their peers, engages in unusual visual behaviours (e.g., looking through the corner of their eyes, staring closely at items or text), or they seem to have notably different perceptual abilities compared to their same-age peers, it is recommended you seek additional help. Furthermore, if you have tried implementing the suggested strategies, as well as other recommendations or supports available at your school, but the problem persists, you might consider the following explanations that require professional support:

- **Health concerns:** The student may have a vision difference that interferes with their ability to work with visual information. Referrals should be made to a physician or optometrist.
- **Physical and motor concerns:** If the student is notably delayed in developing motor skills (e.g., difficulties with pencil grasp or motor coordination for daily living tasks), or if they engage in atypical motor movements and posturing (e.g., from low muscle tone), it may be recommended to see a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.
- **Mental Health concerns:** General emotional difficulties, as well as many mental health experiences (e.g., anxiety, depression, trauma, psychosis) may interfere with one's ability to attend to, process, and use visual information. If the student is presenting with other indicators of mental health concerns (e.g., easily upset, regularly anxious, withdrawn, or explosive) it may be helpful for them to see a physician or a mental health counsellor depending on what support is most available in your community.
- **Neurodevelopmental conditions:** The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition that results in differences in how they process and use visual information (e.g., ASD, FASD, ADHD, learning disability, or intellectual disability). A psychology assessment may be recommended if this is suspected.

Cognitive Proficiency Skills

What am I observing?

Any of the following observations may indicate cognitive proficiency skill difficulties that require support:

- ☐ Does not complete or follow through with instructions or requests.
- ☐ Has difficulty completing multi-step tasks; needs instructions one step at a time.
- ☐ Appears to forget steps or parts of instructions.
- ☐ Requires frequent reminders.
- ☐ Frequently asks for repetition or checks back with instructions.
- ☐ Struggles with academic work that requires holding information in mind (e.g., math, reading comprehension).
- ☐ Has difficulty with memorization.
- ☐ Struggles to recall information on tests.
- ☐ Is quiet in class.
- ☐ Has difficulty providing answers when called upon.
- ☐ Appears to forget information they knew the day before.
- ☐ Does not seem to recognize material that was previously taught.
- ☐ Shows slow progress in learning from day to day.
- ☐ May either become confused by multiple-choice tests or show improved recall with multiple-choice options.
- ☐ Works slowly or is slow to provide responses.
- ☐ Demonstrates slow fluency in reading, writing, and/or math (e.g., reading smoothly and quickly, completing math drills).
- ☐ Has difficulty organizing information for task completion (e.g., developing an outline for an essay, identifying steps in a math problem).
- ☐ Gets stuck and cannot come up with a plan to solve problems.
- ☐ Has difficulty initiating tasks.
- ☐ Does not take initiative to ask for help.

What is this telling me?

Several factors beyond strengths or support needs in cognitive proficiency skills could account for the observations listed. However, it may be helpful to consider one or more of the following subdomains of cognitive proficiency as potential explanations for these concerns. Cognitive proficiency refers to an individual's efficiency and effectiveness in processing information and completing tasks. Notably, cognitive proficiency can often be impacted by attention. It is also important to recognize that students may demonstrate strengths in some cognitive proficiency subdomains while needing support in others.

- **Working Memory:** A student may have difficulty holding information in their mind and actively using it to solve problems or complete tasks. Working memory impacts the ability to follow through on instructions and complete multi-step tasks, as well as to complete academic work that requires holding information in mind (e.g., math and reading comprehension).
- **General Memory:** A student may have limited skills or abilities for transferring information to memory, effectively storing information in memory, and retrieving the information when needed. These skills impact memorization, performance on tests, recall in class, and learning progression from day to day.
- **Memory Recognition:** A student may struggle with recognizing information previously taught or presented, and retrieving information from memory when cued. When students have difficulties with memory recognition, it can impact multiple choice test performance, as well as recognizing previously taught information and lessons.
- **Processing Speed:** Refers to the ability to complete tasks quickly and efficiently. A student may need more time to process information and complete tasks.
- **Oral Fluency:** Please refer to verbal skills section for details on oral fluency.
- **Reading/Writing/Math Fluency:** A student may be slow to complete reading, writing, and math tasks. This is often related to other difficulties such as general processing speed, phonics, working memory, or visual-motor integration which can interfere with fluency.
- **Executive Functioning and attention:** These skill areas are closely related to cognitive proficiency abilities. Difficulties in these areas can also interfere with processing speed, fluency, and memory processes. Please refer to the following section on executive functioning, attention, and hyperactivity for more details on these abilities and support strategies.

What strategies can I try?

There are many modifications that can be made to teaching style, class work, and evaluative assignments, as well as technological or formal supports that may be implemented to support students with cognitive proficiency difficulties. Some examples are below:

Present information in a shorter format, for example:

- Provide instructions/ask questions 1-2 pieces at a time
- Break information and tasks into small parts
- Reduce the amount of information to learn at a time
- Reduce number of items to complete on repetition assignments if the student is easily frustrated or works slowly

Provide reference materials to reduce memory load, such as:

- Use visuals and lists
- Provide written instruction
- Teach students to make lists, use an agenda, write things down, and set alarms

Increase the use of prompts, reminders and repetition, including:

- Provide prompts and reminders
- Give instructions and reminders when it is time for a task (avoid delays between giving an instruction and the time when the task must be done)
- Provide extra instruction and repeat teaching
- Use visual timer or alarms

Explicitly teach and model memory skills, such as:

- Teach memory strategies (e.g., mnemonic devices)
- Teach information in organized ways to help organize memory (e.g., categorize or colour code information)
- Use cues when teaching to help categorize information in memory and prompt recall (e.g., visuals, multiple choice, options, starting prompts)
- Practice retrieval with quizzes, flashcards or quick review
- Foster active engagement in material such as having student summarize information in their own words, teach information to a peer, or apply information to real life scenarios

Slow down, for example:

- Allow extra time on tests and assignments
- Slow down lessons
- Talk more slowly, pause and wait for response

Provide support to mitigate underlying skills interfering with performance, such as:

- Provide instruction in a format that is stronger for the student (visual/verbal)
- Consider intervention for the underlying skill (e.g., phonics, visual motor skills)
- Provide speech-to-text or text-to-speech technology
- Provide a scribe or written notes
- Access to calculator or math table



When do I go get more help?

If you have tried implementing the above strategies, as well as other recommendations or supports available at your school, but the problem persists, you might consider the following explanations that require professional support:

- **Health concerns:** In addition to vision and hearing difficulties that may interfere with cognitive proficiency skills, concussions or seizures may also impact these abilities. If you suspect any of these concerns, it is recommended that the student see a physician or another appropriate health care professional.
- **Physical and motor concerns:** If the student is notably delayed in developing motor skills, this can impact how efficiently they complete tasks, and it may be recommended that they see a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.
- **Mental Health concerns:** General emotional difficulties, as well as many mental health experiences (for example, anxiety, depression, trauma, or psychosis), often interfere with cognitive proficiency abilities. If the student is showing other indicators of mental health concerns (for example, easily upset, regularly anxious, withdrawn, or explosive), it may be helpful for them to see a physician or a mental health counsellor depending on what support is most available in your community.
- **Neurodevelopmental condition:** The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition that results in differences in how they process and use visual information. A psychological assessment may be recommended if this is suspected.

Executive Functioning, Attention, and Hyperactivity

What am I observing?

- ☐ Difficulty getting started, asking for help, or initiating tasks and activities
- ☐ Student does not know where to start or expresses that they do not know how to complete a skill you have previously seen them do before
- ☐ Forgetful and seems to lose track of tasks or steps when multitasking
- ☐ Frequently loses or misplaces personal belongings
- ☐ Loses track of time and struggles to complete work on time
- ☐ Often appears to not be listening or expresses difficulty focusing
- ☐ May appear scattered, messy, or disorganized
- ☐ Often blurts out answers and has difficulty waiting their turn
- ☐ Frequently acts or speaks without thinking and may do things they know they should not
- ☐ May appear as though they are not trying
- ☐ Frequently makes careless mistakes or shows inattention to details
- ☐ Does not seem to adjust behaviour or learn from previous mistakes
- ☐ May have big reactions that a20cppear disproportionate to the problem at hand
- ☐ Frequently fidgets, moves around, or appears highly energetic

What is this telling me?

Several factors could account for the observations listed. However, if you are noticing consistent patterns of these behaviours, it may be helpful to consider whether support needs related to executive functioning, attention, or hyperactivity could help explain what you are seeing.

Executive functioning refers to a set of cognitive skills we use to engage in problem solving and complete goal-directed tasks. Attention and hyperactivity are other skills closely related to executive functioning. Together, these abilities are essential for developing independence, succeeding in academic settings, and maintaining healthy relationships. A student may experience difficulty in one specific area or across several different areas.

Cognitive Flexibility: The ability to switch between different ways of thinking or to adapt behaviour in response to new, changing, or unexpected events. For example, transitioning from break time to a required activity. It supports problem solving, adjusting to new situations, and thinking creatively.

Initiation: The ability to begin a task or activity without unnecessary delay, such as getting started when given instructions in class, or initiating social interactions. It can be difficult for a student to start a task if they do not understand it, or if they feel overwhelmed by the size of the request and have trouble breaking it down or creating a plan.

Organization: The ability to arrange thoughts, tasks, and materials in a clear and efficient way. For example, keeping track of personal belongings or managing materials for school. It supports planning, time management, and keeping track of assignments.

Planning: The ability to set goals, create steps to achieve them, and anticipate future needs or challenges. For example, making a list of what is needed to complete a project. Planning is important for problem solving, managing time, completing work, making responsible decisions, and following through on commitments.

Self-Monitoring: The ability to recognize and evaluate your own performance and behaviour, and make adjustments as needed. For example, noticing how others are responding to you and modifying your behaviour. Self-monitoring supports editing work, using feedback to improve, self-regulation, and building positive social relationships.

Inhibitory Control: The ability to pause and think before acting, helping to manage impulses and resist distractions. For example, waiting your turn to speak. Inhibitory control supports focus, emotion regulation, rule-following, and thoughtful decision making in class and social situations.

Working Memory: The ability to hold and use information in your mind for short periods while completing a task. It is essential for following directions and problem solving, and is an important skill for academic areas such as reading comprehension and math problem solving.

Attention: The ability to focus and avoid distraction. For example, staying on task without getting distracted by others or by your own thoughts. When attention is difficult to sustain, students may miss important information, which can interfere with both learning and social interactions.

Hyperactivity: A pattern of excessive movement, restlessness, and difficulty staying still or calm. This may include frequent fidgeting, talking, or moving in situations where it is not appropriate. Hyperactivity can interfere with daily activities, focus, and participation in class routines.



What strategies can I try?

There are many modifications that can be made to teaching approaches, classroom activities, and evaluative assignments to support students with executive functioning skills:

- Build habits and routines through consistency and repetition
- Provide meaningful and creative outlets
- Be patient and use redirection for impulsive or forgetful behaviour, rather than reprimanding or correcting
- Teach students to break tasks or projects into manageable steps and to prioritize based on importance. Provide a visual sequence or list of steps as a reminder
- Help students estimate and track task completion times to build awareness of time
- Explicitly teach rules and expectations, using visuals such as pictures or lists as reminders
- Provide or teach students to create checklists, templates, and outlines for multi-step tasks
- Teach students how to use organizational tools such as paper planners, digital calendars, alarms, timers, or reminder notifications
- Teach planning and work completion techniques such as the Pomodoro method or the Four Quadrants of Time Management
- Offer a quiet space in the classroom where students can regroup and self-regulate
- Provide opportunities for fun problem solving and flexible thinking through games or cooperative play
- Help students reflect on the consequences of their actions and how their behaviour may affect others
- Encourage students to plan ahead for challenging situations or generate their own solutions to problems (for example, asking "what do you think you should do?")
- Model problem solving by speaking your thought processes out loud

When students struggle with attention, you might try:

- Organizing the classroom space to reduce distractions
- Assigning individual seating with the option of a privacy screen, or grouping the student with peers who model focus
- Using a quick pace when presenting information to help maintain attention
- Reducing time demands for work periods and focused learning
- Incorporating regular breaks (for example, setting a visual timer for work and break times)
- Encouraging movement breaks, such as walking to the washroom or getting a drink of water
- Help the student break tasks into smaller, more manageable parts
- Using external reminders such as alarms, post-it notes, or scheduled phone alerts
- Using a countdown timer to provide a visual cue for time remaining
- Seating the student near the teacher to support gentle redirection when needed
- Allowing music during independent work periods to help sustain concentration

When students appear to have support needs related to hyperactivity, you may try:

- Incorporating walking or physical movement into class activities
- Allowing the use of fidget toys and movement breaks
- Encouraging exercise and activity, especially before tasks that require sustained focus
- Scheduling regular physical activity throughout the day
- Allowing appropriate movement around the classroom
- Helping students identify strategies that help their bodies feel calm, focused, or alert
- Providing access to alternate seating options to support different postural and movement needs

When should I get more help?

- If you suspect a health concern, such as vision or hearing difficulties, may be interfering with skills, it should be assessed by an appropriate health professional as soon as possible.
- If you have tried implementing these strategies, as well as other recommendations or supports available at your school, but the problem persists, you might consider the following explanations that require professional support.
- **Mental health concerns:** General emotional difficulties, as well as many mental health experiences (for example, anxiety, depression, trauma, or psychosis), can cause a student to appear hyperactive or can interfere with attention and executive functioning abilities. If the student is showing other signs of mental health concerns (for example, easily upset, regularly anxious, withdrawn, or explosive), it may be helpful for them to see a physician or a mental health counsellor, depending on what support is most available in your community.
- **Neurodevelopmental condition:** The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition that results in differences in the development and use of attention, executive functioning, or motor regulation abilities. In particular, students with ADHD, FASD, or ASD often present with support needs in these areas. A psychological assessment may be recommended if this is suspected.

Supporting Social Communication Skills

Social Communication

Supporting Social Communication Skills

What am I observing?

Any of the following observations may indicate that a student's social communication abilities differ from typical expectations and that they may benefit from support:

- ☐ Reduced or intense eye contact, or no eye contact
- ☐ Exaggerated or subdued use of, or misinterpretation of others' use of, their body language, gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice
- ☐ Differences in prosody of speech (for example, high pitch, jerky speech, or sing-song speech)
- ☐ Reduced social initiation or responsiveness (for example, fewer greetings, limited participation in conversation, or hesitation to ask for help)
- ☐ One-sided or reduced conversation (for example, not asking follow-up questions or not responding to implied questions)
- ☐ Limited elaboration in responses (for example, offering only one- or two-word answers)
- ☐ Difficulty staying on topic (for example, conversation may become tangential, focused on finishing their own thought, or repeatedly returning to a preferred topic)
- ☐ Reduced ability to communicate or understand emotions (for example, identifying how they feel or recognizing others' feelings)
- ☐ Literal interpretation of language (for example, difficulty understanding idioms, sarcasm, or figures of speech)
- ☐ Difficulty performing socially expected behaviour across different situations or contexts
- ☐ Difficulty making and maintaining relationships
- ☐ Confusion about the nature of different relationships (for example, mistaking bullying for friendship, or misunderstanding expectations within reciprocal friendships or dating relationships)
- ☐ Reduced interest in others (for example, preferring more time alone)
- ☐ Differences in play preferences (for example, less interest in creative or imaginative play, greater interest in repetitive play)

What is this telling me?

Several factors could account for the observations listed. For example, impulsivity or inattention can prevent a student from noticing social cues or opportunities, while anxiety or a history of trauma can affect comfort and confidence in social settings. Some students may have speech or language difficulties that make communication more challenging. In these cases, a student may possess social communication abilities but struggle to apply them consistently, resulting in social difficulties.

Beyond these possibilities, it may also be helpful to consider whether a student's development of foundational social communication abilities differs from that of their peers, and whether this could help explain the social differences observed in the classroom. Social communication abilities are essential for engaging in social interaction, relating to others, interpreting social situations, and developing meaningful relationships.

Some foundational areas of social communication include:

- **Nonverbal Communication Skills:**
  Examples of these skills include eye contact, body language, gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Some students may have difficulty interpreting the nonverbal behaviour of others, have different preferences for how they use nonverbal communication, struggle to integrate nonverbal cues with their verbal communication, or find certain forms of nonverbal communication uncomfortable or distressing.
- **Social-Emotional Reciprocity Skills:**
  These skills involve knowing how to initiate and respond to social interactions, engaging in conversation, expressing and recognizing emotions, and sharing interests with others. Some students may differ from typical expectations in how they naturally engage socially and may not develop conventional skills for interaction. As a result, social exchanges might feel uncomfortable for both the student and their peers. Students may also feel uncertain about how to engage in reciprocal interactions.
- **Understanding of Interpersonal Relationships:**
  This domain includes the ability to make, maintain, and develop relationships, understand the nature of different types of relationships, engage in social play and leisure activities, adjust behaviour for different social contexts, and show interest in others. Some students may have different preferences for their interpersonal relationships and may experience difficulty navigating them based on typical expectations. For example, a student may enjoy social time but also need significant time alone to recharge, or they may feel more comfortable with structured or play-based interactions rather than open conversation or sharing personal experiences.

- **Theory of Mind:**
  Theory of Mind can be thought of as an internal "social radar." It is the ability to understand that other people have their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perspectives that may differ from your own. When students have difficulty in this area, they may struggle to interpret and respond appropriately to social situations, as they may not readily infer what others are thinking or feeling.
- **Pragmatic Language:**
  Pragmatic language refers to the social rules of communication, including how language is used in different contexts, how nonverbal cues are interpreted, and how conversations are maintained. It involves skills such as taking turns in conversation, staying on topic, and recognizing the subtleties of tone, body language, and facial expressions. Pragmatic language skills are closely connected to nonverbal communication and social-emotional reciprocity abilities.

What strategies can I try?

- There are many ways to adjust teaching approaches and classroom activities to support students with social communication differences. The following strategies may help with understanding and accommodating differences in nonverbal communication:
- Reduce reliance on nonverbal communication as indicators of emotion or comprehension. Instead, reflect your observations and seek clarification (for example, "You just mentioned something fun, but you don't look very happy. I just want to check, how are you feeling?")
- Avoid taking flat emotional expressions or limited eye contact personally
- Use a calm voice, clear body language, and facial expressions to signal that you are a safe and supportive person
- Avoid speaking too loudly, sternly, or in an overly excited tone, as this can sometimes be misinterpreted as anger or aggression

The following strategies may help with supporting and accommodating differences in social-emotional reciprocity skills:

- Use clear and literal language
- Make direct and explicit requests or questions rather than relying on implied meaning
- Prompt responses from the student when appropriate
- Vary how you ask questions (for example, multiple choice, yes/no, or open-ended questions)
- Revisit questions more than once to give additional processing opportunities
- Ask follow-up questions to encourage elaboration or clarification
- Wait patiently for a response (count silently to five to allow for processing time)
- Clarify emotions explicitly (for example, state how you are feeling and ask how the student is feeling)
- Help students create simple scripts to guide responses in common situations (for example, "I don't understand" or "Please help me")
- Incorporate structured social interactions that provide clear expectations and roles

The following strategies may be helpful for increasing comfort in social settings and supporting interpersonal relationships:

- Build familiarity and rapport
- Identify a few familiar people the student feels comfortable going to for support
- Structure play activities to increase social predictability
- Debrief and explain social interactions
- Be patient with and normalize a typical social behavior
- Avoid forcing normative behaviours (e.g., eye contact)
- Provide clear and repeated introductions to help the student become familiar with people
- Limit the number of people interacting at one time
- Create purposeful and scheduled opportunities for positive interaction

When should I get more help?

- If you suspect that difficulties with hearing, vision, or speech are interfering with social engagement, it is recommended that you seek additional help from a relevant clinical service provider (for example, an audiologist, optometrist, or speech and language pathologist).
- If you have tried implementing the strategies, as well as other recommendations or supports available at your school, but difficulties with social communication persist, you might consider the following explanations that require professional support:

Mental health concerns: General emotional difficulties, as well as many mental health experiences (for example, anxiety, selective mutism, depression, trauma, or psychosis), may interfere with a student's ability to engage in social interaction and use social communication skills. If the student is showing other indicators of mental health concerns (for example, becoming easily upset, frequently anxious, withdrawn, or explosive), it may be helpful for them to see a physician or mental health counsellor, depending on what support is available in your community.

Neurodevelopmental condition: he student may have a neurodevelopmental condition (for example, ASD, FASD, language disorder, or intellectual disability) that results in differences in how they develop and use social communication skills. A psychological assessment may be recommended if this is suspected. For more information, please refer to the Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics Handbook.

Supporting Sensory Processing

Supporting Sensory Processing

What am I observing?

- ☐ Seeking, avoiding, or reacting to certain types of sensory input
- ☐ Overreacting or underreacting to specific sensory experiences
- ☐ Difficulty with fine motor skills (for example, printing) and gross motor skills (for example, using stairs)
- ☐ Engaging in repetitive motor behaviours (for example, rocking, jumping, spinning, or repetitive hand movements)
- ☐ Climbing, crashing, or intentionally falling
- ☐ Difficulty paying attention, especially in busy or loud environments, or when required to sit without physical support (for example, during carpet time)
- ☐ Increased need for control, sameness, and predictability
- ☐ Increased anxiety or irritability in the presence of sensory stimuli
- ☐ Needing breaks or time to decompress
- ☐ Difficulty respecting others' personal space
- ☐ Hitting or otherwise harming their own body (for example, banging their head, or biting themselves)
- ☐ Chewing on non-food items
- ☐ Strong dislike of self-care activities such as toothbrushing, bathing, or haircuts

What is this telling me?

Several factors could contribute to the behaviours listed. However, it may be especially helpful to consider the role of sensory processing as a possible explanation for what you are observing.

Sensory processing is the ability to take in, sort, and organize sensory information for functional use. Processing and responding accurately to sensory input supports the development of motor, perceptual, and cognitive skills. It also helps us filter out non-essential information so that we can focus our attention where it is needed. Accurate processing of sensory information from within our bodies also enables us to identify our feelings and recognize when our physical needs require attention.

Sensory processing challenges occur when the brain has difficulty accurately interpreting or responding to sensory information from the environment or the body. While everyone experiences their senses differently, sensory processing challenges may present in the following ways:

- **Hypersensitivity:** Some students react more strongly to sensory input than others might find typical. For example, they may feel overwhelmed by loud noises, bright lights, or certain textures because their senses are more sensitive than usual. As a result, they may avoid or seek out sensory input that others barely notice.
- **Hyposensitivity:** Some students have a reduced response to sensory input. They might not notice sounds, touch, or movement to the same extent as others and may actively seek out more intense sensory experiences to feel more regulated or balanced.

These types of sensory differences may occur in one or more of the eight main sensory systems. A person can be hypersensitive to one type of input and hyposensitive to another. The following chart on the next page provides examples of signs, organized by sensory system, that may indicate a person is experiencing hypo- or hypersensitivity. This list is not exhaustive and does not replace a formal sensory processing assessment. It should be used only to help identify children who may benefit from a referral to an occupational therapist.

Sensory System	Hypersensitive	Hyposensitive
Tactile *Touch*	May dislike having dirty hands, be bothered by tags or seams in clothing, or avoid certain food textures. May seek out items in their environment that feel pleasant to touch. May dislike or avoid self-care tasks such as toothbrushing or nail cutting.	May not notice when their hands or face are dirty, may be a messy eater, and may not realize when clothes are on backwards or twisted. May seek out additional opportunities for touch in their environment.
Visual *Sight*	May dislike or have difficulty concentrating under certain types of lighting (for example, fluorescent lights). May look closely at objects, prefer sameness in their environment and become overwhelmed in busy or disorganized spaces.	May seek out additional visual input (for example, watching flickering lights, twirling strings, moving their hands near their face, or looking at objects from the corner of their eye). May respond slowly to or miss visual cues, such as not noticing when someone enters the room.
Auditory *Hearing*	May dislike crowds and noisy environments, and may be bothered by sounds that others do not notice (for example, chewing, air conditioning, or the buzzing of fluorescent lights). May have difficulty tolerating household appliances such as vacuums or blenders, or struggle to focus when there are competing sounds (for example, trying to listen to one person while others are talking). May create their own noises or vocalizations to block out external sounds.	May miss verbal cues, such as not responding when their name is called. May enjoy listening to music or seek out items or games that make sounds.
Olfactory *Smell*	May react strongly to certain smells (for example, gagging) or have difficulty tolerating shared spaces where others are eating. May be a picky eater.	May not notice unpleasant odours in the environment or on themselves. May enjoy or seek out strong smells, such as cleaning products.

Sensory System	Hypersensitive	Hyposensitive
Gustatory *Taste*	May eat primarily bland foods or a limited variety of foods. May be a picky eater.	May prefer highly seasoned foods that are very tangy, salty, sweet, spicy, or sour.
Proprioception Body *Position, feedback from muscles and joints*	May avoid activities that require physical effort or strength.	May slouch or lean when sitting, have poor body awareness, or seem unaware of others' personal space. May seek out deep pressure, have difficulty remaining still when expected to stay seated, or seek items to chew on, such as pens or clothing. May jump, climb, crash, or pretend to fall to get the sensory input their body craves. May require more sensory input to feel regulated.
Vestibular *Movement of head, balance and reactions to gravity*	May avoid swings or playground equipment, or appear anxious when their feet leave the ground. May move with stiffness or caution and may become motion sick easily.	May have poor balance or difficulty remaining still when expected to stay seated. May appear unaffected by dizziness and seek out additional movement, such as swinging, rocking, swaying, jumping, or spinning.
Interoception *Internal sensations (from organs or associated with feelings)*	May experience body signals as more intense (for example, feeling hunger as pain or frequently feeling the need to urinate). May become easily overwhelmed by their own feelings and have difficulty interpreting or labeling physical sensations and emotions.	May have difficulty noticing, identifying, labeling, or interpreting body sensations (for example, thirst, hunger, body temperature, and emotions). May be forgetful about self-care, such as not recognizing when they are tired or in need of a break, and forget to eat or drink throughout the day. May miss early signs of their own escalation.

What strategies can I try?

- Educators are often faced with accommodating a range of sensory preferences and needs within their classrooms. For some individuals, sensory support needs may decrease with age as the nervous system matures. For others, sensory differences may persist throughout life, though they can look different at various stages of development.
- The following strategies can benefit most students and may be implemented as classroom-wide supports or used individually as needed.

Increase Opportunities for Sensory Input

- Provide access to activities that include rhythmic, repetitive movement, as this is calming for most nervous systems.
- Offer a variety of seating options for students to choose from (for example, rocking chairs, wiggle cushions, wobble stools, standing desks, or bean bag chairs).
- Provide access to fidget tools and teach the class how to use them appropriately to support attention and movement needs.
- Incorporate deep pressure tools and activities, such as weighted blankets or squeezing a cushion or pillow.
- Break up long periods of seated learning with opportunities for movement throughout the day. Offer classroom helper roles (for example, taking attendance, handing out materials, erasing the board, or picking up supplies from the office).
- Protect recess time to ensure students have structured opportunities to step away from the classroom and engage in physical activity.
- Incorporate activities that involve pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, or climbing (often referred to as "heavy work"). These provide deep pressure input that helps organize the nervous system and support regulation throughout the day.

Decrease Potentially Overwhelming Sensory Input

- Use natural light or softer lighting options whenever possible.
- Reduce classroom noise that might be distracting or uncomfortable (for example, lower the volume on speaker systems and monitor the overall noise level). Be mindful of sound coming from the hallway, outdoors, or classroom items such as fish tanks, fans, or air purifiers.
- Minimize visual clutter in the classroom (for example, limit the amount of work or decorations displayed on walls or hanging from the ceiling).
- Avoid using scented products in the classroom.

Create a Break Space Within the Classroom

Creating a designated space in the classroom, such as a book nook or quiet corner, gives students a place to decompress. This can reduce the need for students to leave the room for breaks and supports the development of self monitoring and self regulation skills.

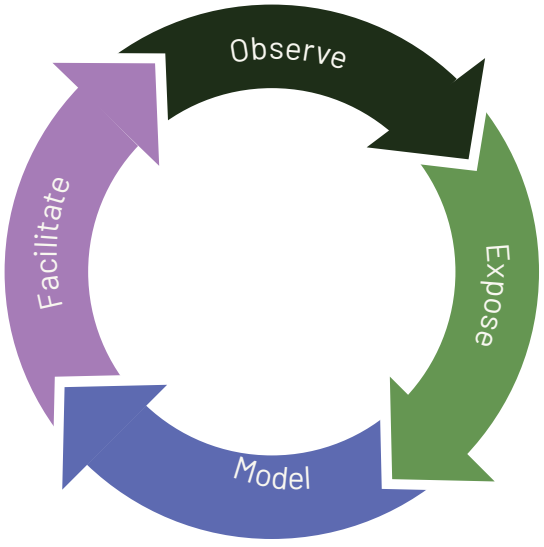
This space should look and feel different from the rest of the classroom. Consider using mats, pillows, or bean bag chairs in a low-traffic area. Calming tools such as books, colouring materials, or fidget tools can also be made available. Involving the class in designing this space can encourage student buy-in and help them reflect on what helps their body feel calm.

It is important that this space always maintain a positive association. A child should never be sent there as a consequence, and it should never be used as a "time-out" area. Teachers can suggest that a student might benefit from using the quiet space for a break, but it should always be the child's choice, and they must be allowed to enter and leave freely.

Sensory Strategy Learning Model

Using sensory strategies is like learning a new behaviour or routine, it requires time, repetition, consistency, and support. Consider using the Sensory Strategy Learning Model to help with introducing a new strategy to the classroom or to individual students.

- **Observe:** use your observation skills to notice what tools and strategies work for the class or individual. Then use those observations to choose a new tool you think would suit them.
- **Expose:** make the tool available for the class or individual to explore. They will decide if it is something they want to try.
- **Model:** use the tool yourself. Talk about what you are doing and how it feels for you.
- **Facilitate:** talk about the tool and how it might feel for them. It may take time before they are ready to try something new.
- **Observe:** come back to your observation skills. How are they responding to the strategy? What does this tool help them do? Are there changes you can make to the strategy?



When should I get more help?

The strategies listed above are general in nature and may not be enough to meet the needs of a specific child with sensory processing differences. If you have tried implementing these strategies, along with other recommendations or supports available at your school, but difficulties with sensory processing persist, you might consider the following:

- **Health concerns:** Attempts to rule out or address physical health concerns should be made before, or alongside, implementing sensory support strategies. If you suspect that hearing or vision difficulties are interfering with sensory processing, it is recommended that you seek additional help from a relevant clinical service provider (for example, an audiologist or optometrist). It may also be important for the student to have a physical check-up with a physician or nurse practitioner to ensure there are no medical conditions contributing to sensory sensitivity or discomfort.
- **Occupational Therapy (OT):** An occupational therapist can assess the child to better understand which specific areas are challenging. They can then collaborate with you to modify the environment and identify specific activities, equipment, seating options, or strategies that may be especially helpful.

If a child is currently meeting their sensory needs in a way that is unsafe or interfers with daily activities, an occupational therapist can recommend safer and more effective alternatives. If specific items or adapted equipment are suggested, such as weighted tools or noise-cancelling headphones, the OT will provide safety guidelines for their use.

These guidelines vary for each student based on their individual needs and presentation. It is important not to generalize or apply recommendations from one student to another. Each child should have their own assessment and individualized guidance for safe and effective use.

- **Mental Health concerns:** General emotional difficulties, as well as many mental health concerns (e.g., anxiety, depression, trauma, psychosis) may interfere with one's sensory processing and sensitivity. If the student is presenting with other indicators of mental health concerns (e.g., easily upset, regularly anxious, withdrawn, or explosive) it may be helpful for them to see a physician or a mental health counsellor depending on what support is most available in your community.
- **Neurodevelopmental condition:** The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition (e.g., ASD, FASD, ADHD, or intellectual disability) that results in differences in how they process and tolerate sensory information. A psychological assessment may be recommended if this is suspected. Please refer to information about diagnoses in the **An Educator's Guide to Professional Assessments and Diagnostics** handbook.

Supporting Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation Support

Self-Regulation

What am I observing?

The following examples may help identify when a student is experiencing challenges with self-regulation:

- ☐ Physical cues such as flushed cheeks, red ears, dilated pupils, or yawning.
- ☐ Becoming easily agitated, emotionally reactive, or acting impulsively.
- ☐ Appearing shut down, apathetic, or checked out.
- ☐ Appearing defiant or non-compliant.
- ☐ Difficulty using language to describe how they are feeling or verbally recount something that happened.
- ☐ Repetitive questioning or perseverative (or "stuck") thinking.
- ☐ Repetitive motor behaviours such as "stimming," fidgeting, rocking, or making vocalizations.
- ☐ Pacing or expressing a need to leave the room or take a break.
- ☐ Distress in response to change or transitions; requiring support with transitions.
- ☐ Insistence on sameness (e.g., following the same schedule every day, eating or wearing the same thing daily).
- ☐ Difficulty disengaging from intense interests.

What is this telling me?

While many factors could contribute to the behaviours listed, it may be especially helpful to consider the role of self-regulation as a potential explanation.

Self-regulation is defined in various ways but generally refers to the ability to:

- Identify one's current level of energy or alertness (i.e., state of physiological arousal)
- Understand based on past experiences or social cues what state of arousal is appropriate for the situation
- Adjust one's body to reach the desired state (e.g., up-regulating or down-regulating arousal levels)

Being able to self-regulate helps students manage their emotions, behaviours, and thoughts in ways that support success and long-term goals. When any part of this process breaks down, students may become dysregulated.

A student's ability to self-regulate both affects and is affected by many of the other skills discussed in this handbook. As such, content from other sections may also be helpful in supporting regulation.

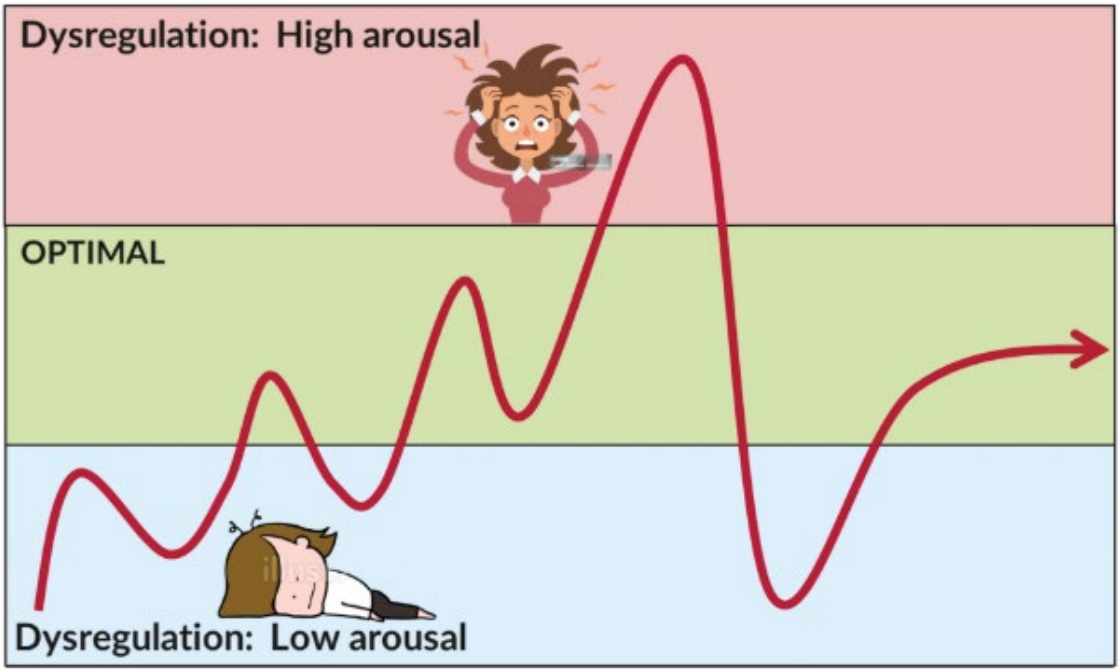
There are also several factors that impact a person's ability to self-regulate. Some of these factors are amenable to change, while others are not. These factors include, but are not limited to the following:

- Age
- Cognitive level
- Social relationships
- Parenting
- Baseline arousal
- Sensory processing
- Attachment
- Strong emotions or thoughts
- Prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol
- Trauma
- Specific diagnoses (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Posture and motor skills
- Stress
- Exposure to positive or negative models of self-regulation (co-regulation)
- Nutrition
- Stimulants (e.g., caffeine, medication)
- Availability of free leisure time
- Amount of time outside
- Amount of exercise
- Structure and routine
- Sleep
- Drug or alcohol use

There are a handful of concepts that are important to consider when trying to understand how regulation contributes to a student's behaviour. Understanding these concepts can help educators modify expectations in the moment when working with students by considering the following:

- **Arousal States**: Our arousal levels naturally fluctuate throughout the day in response to various internal and external factors. Different activities, situations, or environments require different levels of arousal, and we may intentionally or subconsciously adjust our own arousal to match what is needed or expected. While higher arousal can be useful for exciting activities (e.g., cheering at a game, participating in gym class) and lower arousal for calming ones (e.g., falling asleep), staying in the optimal zone helps us remain in control and ready to learn, build relationships, develop skills, and engage with our environment.

- **Dysregulation**: This occurs when a person moves outside of their optimal zone of arousal into either a high or low arousal state. When dysregulated, a person's ability to manage emotions, feel safe in their body, cope with stressors, learn new information, recall previously learned material, communicate effectively, and perform tasks is impaired. Students who have experienced trauma or prolonged exposure to stressors are especially at risk for dysregulation, as they may struggle to shift from survival mode (i.e., high or low arousal) to thinking mode (i.e., optimal arousal).



- **Co-Regulation**: Self-regulation is influenced by executive functioning skills and other closely related abilities. Please see the section of this handbook on Executive Functioning, Attention, and Hyperactivity for more information and support strategies. Notably, the parts of the brain responsible for executive functioning do not fully mature until early adulthood, meaning self-regulation skills continue to develop into that time. Children and young adults rely on the individuals around them to model and support regulation. This supportive process, where one person uses their presence, actions, or emotional state to help another regulate, is called co-regulation.
- **Repetitive Behaviours**: Also known as self-stimulating behaviours or "stimming," these are typically repetitive in nature and vary between individuals. For some, stimming may take the form of rocking, humming, or other vocalizations, repetitive speech (e.g., scripting or echoing phrases), or specific hand movements. People may stim either consciously or subconsciously to regulate their nervous system, seek comfort or pleasure, or block out unpleasant sensory input. Stimming can also be a sign that someone is trying to self-regulate during dysregulation. It is common in young children and in individuals who are neurodivergent, as they may experience or cope with dysregulation differently than their neurotypical peers.
- **Adherence to Routine**: A preference for and adherence to routine refers to the tendency to rely on structured, predictable schedules and activities. This can support self-regulation by providing a sense of stability and reducing uncertainty, which can be calming and help manage stress. For many individuals, especially those who are neurodivergent, routines create a predictable environment that supports emotional and behavioural regulation.

What strategies can I try?

No matter the reason for dysregulation, it is important to recognize and label its impact on a student's ability to learn. This also helps identify the best support strategies. The strategies below can benefit most children and may be used classroom-wide or with individual students as needed.

Self-care and co-regulate: A dysregulated adult cannot support a dysregulated child effectively. Check in with yourself regularly throughout the day to monitor and attend to your own regulation needs. Reflect on what helps you feel calm and what energizes you when tired, so you can access these tools when needed. Model emotional regulation by labeling your feelings aloud and demonstrating strategies to manage them. Adapt your verbal and nonverbal communication to co-regulate with students. A loud, enthusiastic voice and exaggerated facial expressions or body language can be alerting, while a softer, quieter voice, slower rhythmic speech, gentle body language, and predictable movements can be calming.

Reframe how you view behavior: Children with self-regulation difficulties risk being mislabeled as uncooperative, lazy, reactive, or unfocused. Consider how challenges shifting arousal levels may interfere with participation. Talk with the child collaboratively to develop solutions to try together.

Build a relationship: Co-regulation happens within a trusting, predictable relationship. Show genuine interest by engaging in activities or conversations related to the child's interests. Be mindful of your verbal and nonverbal communication, as children can detect subtle cues and micro-expressions.

Increase movement breaks, exercise, and outdoor play: Integrate opportunities for movement, calming "heavy work," and breaks into the classroom environment and daily routines. See Practical Strategies for Supporting Sensory Processing and Supporting Executive Functioning, Attention, and Hyperactivity sections for more details.

Set up the environment to promote success: Increased structure, routine, and predictability can support self-regulation. See the Sensory Processing section for classroom setup recommendations.

Match tasks to the student's abilities and arousal state: Tasks that are too easy can cause boredom; tasks that are too hard can cause stress. Consider whether expectations are realistic for the student's current arousal level. Adjust duration, timing, difficulty, location, visuals, or staff support to improve participation.

Use calming and alerting strategies: Experiment in the classroom to help students learn what helps their bodies achieve and maintain an optimal level of arousal for learning.

General Alerting Strategies:

- Put on upbeat music.
- Play a silly game.
- Have a snack (crunchy foods, sour tastes, and cold water can be alerting).
- Provide a class-wide movement break, such as jumping jacks or dancing.

Note: Be careful not to overstimulate sensitive or already dysregulated children with these strategies.

General Calming Strategies:

- Put on rhythmic and soothing music in the classroom.
- Engage students in age-appropriate mindfulness, relaxation, and deep breathing activities.
- Have a snack (chewy foods, warm drinks, or drinking through a straw or sport-top water bottle are generally calming).
- Provide opportunities for art, drawing, or journaling.

Teach self-regulation skills: Encourage children to listen to the cues their body are providing.

- Help children learn to recognize and label emotions in themselves and others, for example, by reading books about feelings.
- Provide children with a framework for recognizing and describing their arousal states. See the additional resources section at the back of the manual for programs that can help with this.
- Use and model effective regulation strategies in the classroom.

Respond to stimming in a supportive way: Stimming should not be discouraged unless it poses a safety risk to the student or others. Be non-judgmental and supportive.

- Do not draw attention to the stimming; instead, offer the child a break or another calming activity.
- Consider sensory modifications that might reduce the need to stim. Please see **Practical Strategies for Supporting Sensory Processing**.
- If a student expresses a desire to stop or feels embarrassed by their stimming, work with them to find options for engaging in stimming behaviours privately. Students may choose to go to these spaces but should never be sent there without choice, as this can imply that stimming is unacceptable.
- If you are concerned that a child's stimming is creating social barriers, it may be helpful, with the student's permission, to educate the class about individual differences and how different bodies have different needs to feel comfortable and learn.

When do I go get more help?

If a student is engaging in unsafe behaviors that pose a risk to themselves or others when they are dysregulated, it is important to speak with caregivers immediately and consider supports that may include consultation with clinical services specializing in behavior and regulation (e.g., physician, occupational therapist, behavior therapist, or psychologist).

Supporting Academic Skills

Supporting Academic Skills

What am I observing?

Any of the following observations may indicate difficulties with academic skills that require additional support:

- ☐ Poor grades in reading, writing, or mathematics
- ☐ Frustration, anxiety, or avoidance related to classwork
- ☐ Verbal expressions of discouragement (for example, saying that classwork or assignments are "dumb")
- ☐ Completing work quickly or carelessly
- ☐ Acting as the class clown or using humour to deflect attention from challenges
- ☐ Requiring significant support to perform at grade level
- ☐ Difficulty decoding or sounding out unfamiliar words
- ☐ Poor reading fluency, with slow, choppy, or inaccurate reading
- ☐ Limited reading comprehension, even after multiple readings
- ☐ Difficulty recognizing or recalling sight words
- ☐ Poor spelling, with frequent errors in familiar words
- ☐ Illegible or inconsistent handwriting
- ☐ Difficulty organizing thoughts and ideas when writing
- ☐ Struggles with grammar, punctuation, or sentence structure
- ☐ Difficulty understanding basic math concepts, such as number sense or place value
- ☐ Difficulty memorizing math facts, such as multiplication tables
- ☐ Difficulty following multi-step math procedures or understanding sequencing
- ☐ Struggles with visual-spatial tasks, such as interpreting graphs or geometric figures

What is this telling me?

Several factors could contribute to the observations listed. It is important to first consider the impact of basic health factors (such as vision, hearing, or other physical health concerns) and care needs (including nutrition, sleep, and family stress) on learning and school performance. It is also helpful to reflect on many of the other skill areas discussed throughout this handbook, such as speech and language, reasoning, executive functioning, and sensory processing.

Regardless of the influence of these factors, it may be helpful to consider the following academic skill areas as possible explanations for the observed challenges. These areas can help inform appropriate support strategies. It is also important to note that students may demonstrate strengths in some academic or cognitive skill areas while needing additional support in others.

- **Word Reading Accuracy:** Students may read words inaccurately or hesitantly, guess words, or have difficulty sounding them out. This skill is especially affected by phonological processing abilities, which are discussed elsewhere in this handbook.
- **Reading Rate or Fluency:** This refers to the speed and flow of reading. Difficulties may include slow or uneven reading, with frequent pauses to sound out unfamiliar words or to retrieve word patterns from memory.
- **Reading Comprehension:** This refers to understanding what has been read. Students may struggle with comprehension due to difficulties following sequence, recognizing relationships or inferences, or understanding deeper meaning. In some cases, accurate word reading may still interfere with comprehension if decoding demands too much attention. Conversely, some students may infer meaning from context even if they struggle with word accuracy.
- **Spelling Accuracy:** Spelling difficulties may include adding, omitting, or substituting letters. These challenges are often related to weaknesses in phonological processing.
- **Grammar and Punctuation:** Students may have difficulty with sentence structure, verb tenses, word endings, or punctuation, which can interfere with clarity and readability.
- **Organization of Written Expression:** This may include poor paragraph structure, limited elaboration of ideas, or unclear expression in writing.
- **Understanding Number Sense:** Students may have difficulty understanding numbers, their size, and how they relate to one another.
- **Memorization of Arithmetic Facts:** Students may rely on strategies such as counting on fingers, using a calculator, or referencing tables rather than recalling math facts automatically.
- **Accurate or Fluent Calculation:** Students may work slowly, become confused partway through a problem, switch between procedures, or make frequent calculation errors.
- **Accurate Math Reasoning:** Students may struggle to apply mathematical concepts, facts, or procedures when solving real-world or multi-step quantitative problems.

What strategies can I try?

There are many ways to modify teaching approaches, classroom tasks, and evaluation methods to support students with academic skill difficulties. Technology and formal supports can also play an important role in promoting success.

Strategies for Supporting Reading Difficulties:

- Use technology such as text-to-speech software to increase accessibility
- Modify the reading level of assigned materials
- Read aloud to the student or pair them with a reading buddy
- Increase the use of visuals to support comprehension
- Implement reading interventions, particularly those that target phonological skills
- Teach organizational strategies to support reading comprehension
- Use graphic organizers to help students organize key information from the text

Strategies for Supporting Writing Difficulties:

- Use technology such as speech-to-text software, word prediction, spelling and grammar checking tools, or word processing programs
- Reduce writing demands where appropriate
- Provide dictation support or a note-taker
- Teach strategies for reviewing, checking, and editing written work
- Provide examples or model samples of completed assignments
- Collaborate with occupational therapy to address fine motor or handwriting challenges
- Use graphic organizers to support planning and organization of writing

Strategies for Supporting Mathematics Difficulties:

- Use technology such as calculators or interactive math practice tools
- Reduce the number of calculations required to complete an assignment
- Teach strategies for checking accuracy and reviewing work
- Provide model examples and step-by-step demonstrations
- Use manipulatives and real-life examples to support concept understanding
- Offer learning aids such as math tables or visual reference sheets
- Teach general strategies for approaching and solving math problems

In addition to the strategies outlined, students may benefit from general learning supports and accommodations or modifications to how progress is evaluated. Depending on the student's individual profile and areas of learning difficulty, additional recommendations may include:

- Breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts
- Working in short bursts with frequent breaks
- Structuring work and break times using a timer or visual schedule
- Supporting students in creating a plan for work completion
- Teaching strategies to support memory and recall
- Checking for understanding of key concepts and task instructions
- Using simplified language to increase comprehension
- Incorporating visuals and hands-on learning activities
- Providing small group or one-on-one learning opportunities to build skills
- Offering a quiet space for independent work and test taking
- Providing access to supports during evaluations (for example, a scribe, reader, or assistive technology)
- Allowing extra time for tasks and assessments
- Permitting flexible deadlines when appropriate



When do I go get more help?

If you suspect a health concern, such as vision or hearing difficulties, may be interfering with learning, these should be assessed by an appropriate health professional as soon as possible.

If you have tried implementing the above strategies, along with other supports available at your school, but the challenges persist, you might consider the following explanations that require professional support:

- **Physical and Motor Concerns:** If the student is notably delayed in motor development or struggles significantly with handwriting, a referral to a physiotherapist or occupational therapist may be recommended.
- **Mental Health Concerns:** Emotional difficulties and mental health experiences (such as anxiety, depression, trauma, or psychosis) can interfere with learning. If the student shows additional indicators of mental health concerns (for example, easily upset, regularly anxious, withdrawn, or explosive), it may be helpful for the student to see a physician or a mental health counsellor, depending on available community supports.
- **Neurodevelopmental Condition:** The student may have a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts learning. A psychological assessment may be recommended if this is suspected.

References and Resources

References and Resources

Supporting Students in Elementary and Secondary School

This resource was created to support educators in meeting the diverse learning needs of students across elementary and secondary school settings. Grounded in inclusive, trauma informed, and neurodiversity affirming practices, this manual explores a range of topics that support student engagement, learning, and overall wellbeing.

The guide includes practical strategies and real world examples of sensory processing, self regulation, communication, executive functioning, independence, and classroom routines. It is designed to help educators respond thoughtfully to the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of learners across a wide range of developmental profiles.

Whether you are a classroom teacher, special education teacher, support staff member, or administrator, this manual offers clear explanations and flexible tools that can be adapted to support learners in diverse educational environments. Scan the QR code below to access additional resources, printable visuals, templates, and recommended readings that complement this manual.

References and Resources

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