

Occupational Therapy – Adult Learning Disability Service

Guidance for Skill Development

It is vital to develop skills for people with Learning Disabilities to enable them to lead full and purposeful lives in their communities and to promote their independence, sense of purpose and overall wellbeing. This guidance provides some details about how to begin to support an individual with a Learning Disability to develop and learn new skills.

Skill development can be part of any activity. Examples of this are; brushing teeth, cooking meals, playing sport or getting on a bus. The most important thing to consider is that the skills being developed should be of value to the individual learning them.

It is essential that the individual supporting these skills has a consistent approach and promotes the individuals independence at all times.

Learning the Skills

Firstly you should consider the environment and how this is set up for the individual carrying out the activity.

- All equipment and materials needed for the skill development task should be accessible and in the correct places.
- The environment should be appropriate for completing the skill development task with regard to light, sound and distraction levels.

Next, you should consider the level of skill already possessed by the individual.

- Ask the individual what they know about the task.
- Ask to observe the individual doing the activity; it is important the individual feels supported to try the task.

- When observing consider what the individual is doing, how the individual sequences the task and what the individual finds difficult in relation to the task.
- **Reassurance and praise is vital at this stage.**

Continue to practice the skills regularly decreasing support gradually over time.

- Support can be given in various stages depending on skill level of individual (see appendix below)
- Ongoing encouragement is key for building confidence and self belief.
- Successful skill development leads to increased independence.
- **Remember, if skill development is enjoyable it is more likely to be successful and then attempted again!**

It is important to remember that all individuals will reach their own limits within tasks. For some individuals prompting and guidance will always be required. It is important to view *any* increased involvement of the individual in daily living tasks as a success and a level of independence for them.

Ongoing practice is needed to maintain these skills. It is essential during this practice that the individual is consistently receiving the same reassurance, praise and prompting from the individual supporting them as this will maintain their skill level.

To view further information or to view this process in practice visit You Tube and search “Active Support – Expand Someone’s World”.

To enable us to continually improve our service please contact our Occupational Therapy team if this guidance has been successful or if you are still experiencing difficulties. Please contact our Occupational Therapy Adult Learning Disability Service on **01383 565223**.

Appendix – Skill Development Guide

This tool is to guide you through skill development with the use of a working example; however, the guidance provided will be applicable to all skill development tasks. There is no time limit for each stage and it will greatly depend on the individual's previous exposure to the task. When this is being followed by more than one supporter, regular discussions/recording about the stage of skill development (see stages 1-5 below) alongside the supporter's role at each stage is vital in order to ensure a consistent message/approach and success of learning.

Task Example – Laundry

Environment should be prepared and considered for each stage of the task. Examples in relation to laundry task could be consideration of the following:

- Accessibility to the machine, layout of laundry area.
- Accessibility to laundry products and suitable sized containers
- Clear visible instructions near machine.
- Limited distractions from others when task is being completed.

Stage 1: Individual is dependent on support to carry out all tasks and is unable to make decisions relating to the task.

Supporter's role at this stage:

- Involve the individual in one set task at a time, in this working example we will use doing the laundry.
- Hand over hand guidance (e.g. pouring the powder into beaker).
- Use short direct verbal instructions (e.g. open washing machine door).
- Visual prompts/gestures (e.g. pointing).
- Give choice of two options (e.g. should the black sock go in whites or darks).

Stage 2: Individual is dependent on support to guide through tasks and prompted to make decisions.

Supporter's role at this stage:

- Begin to establish structure for doing said task (e.g. visual prompt on timetable for laundry day).
- Environmental visual/written prompts for guidance through task (e.g. prompt stickers on the machine).
- Use appropriate questioning as to encourage individual to think about next stage in task (e.g. what do you think you do next?)

Stage 3: Individual requires visual and written prompts to guide through tasks and to make decisions

Supporter's role at this stage:

- Clear pictorial/written guidance as to the sequence of the laundry task (e.g. step by step sequence of laundry task from start to finish).
- Allow individual to complete task from start to finish.
- Re-cap with individual if stages of task are missed whilst following the pictorial/written guidance (e.g. missed out step 3, recap step 2 of pictorial/written guidance)
- Provide verbal input if safety or end product could be affected.

Stage 4: Individual can carry out task and make some decisions by self

Supporter's role at this stage:

- Individual to continue to practice existing task (e.g. laundry).
- Supporter to ensure this activity becomes an established routine.
- Individual should be independent with task at this stage, however, awareness of task being completed is required for safety.

Stage 5: Individual can do everyday tasks by self without support, needs help with complex decisions

Supporter's role at this stage:

- The individual may need to seek assistance in the event of unexpected circumstances (e.g. washing machine broken, flooding, chemical spillages).
- Look at another task for skill development and decide where the individual is in terms of skill level for said task.