



Supporting your child at home

Working Memory

What is working memory?

There are three types of memory.

- Sensory memory
- Working memory
- Long term memory

Working memory is where we hold information we want to attend to, for anything from a few seconds to a few minutes (sums/instructions). It is sometimes referred to as 'Short-term memory'.

In school children use and rely upon their working memory to follow instructions, follow directions and remember facts.

Working memory challenges can affect your child in different ways.

A common indicator for poor working memory is if you give a child an instruction and they are interrupted in between following the instruction, they then forget what the initial instruction is.

Similarly, if a child forgets what they are trying to tell you and this is happening often then they could be struggling with their working memory.

How can we improve Working memory?

Working memory can be developed. Think of it like a muscle. It needs exercise to grown and strengthen. If you think your child may need this, use the tips below to support your child at home.

1. Work on visualisation skills.

Encourage your child to create a picture in his mind of what they have just read or heard. For example, if you have told them to set the table for five people, ask them to come up with a mental picture of what the table should look like. Then have him/her draw that picture. As they get better at visualising, they can describe the image to you instead of needing to draw it

2. Let your child teach you.

Being able to explain how to do something involves making sense of information and sorting through it. If your child is learning a skill then ask your child to teach it to you. This works well in class when children model ideas to their learning partners. Describing the action develops vocabulary and requires the child to break the skill down step-by-step.

3. Suggest games that use visual memory.

There are lots of matching games that can help your child work on visual memory. You can do things like give your child a magazine page and ask them to circle all instances of the word *the* or the letter *a* in one minute. You can also turn license plates into a game. Take turns reciting the letters and numbers on a license plate and then saying them backwards, too.

4. Play cards.

Simple card games like Crazy Eights, Uno, Pokemon and Snap can improve working memory in two ways. Your child has to keep the rules of the game in mind. They also have to remember what cards they have and which ones other people have played.

5. Encourage active reading.

This tip is popular with the teachers, Jotting down notes and underlining or highlighting text can help children keep the information in mind long enough to answer questions about it. Talking aloud and asking questions about the reading material can also help with this. Active reading strategies can help with forming long-term memories too. It's a good excuse to use some funky post-it's and highlighter pens.

6. Chunk information into smaller bites.

It is much easier to remember a few small groups of numbers than it is to remember one long string of numbers. Keep this in mind when you need to give your child multi-step directions. Write them down or give them one at a time. This strategy can also be applied to spelling challenging words.

7. Make it multisensory.

Processing information in as many ways as possible can help with working memory and long-term memory. Write tasks down so your child can look at them. Say them aloud so your child can hear them. Toss a ball back and forth while you discuss the tasks your child needs to complete. Using multisensory strategies support learning in a memorable and fun way.

8. Help make connections.

Help your child form associations that connect the different details they are trying to remember. Grab your child's interest with fun mnemonics like Richard of York Gave Battle In Vain. (Thinking about this name can help kids remember the order of the colours in the rainbow.) My personal favourite is Big Elephants Can't Always Use Small Entrances. (Because). Finding ways to connect information helps with forming and retrieving long-term memory. It also helps with working memory, which is what we use to hold and compare new and old memories.

Apps to support working memory

1. Memory!
2. Fit Brains trainer

Games to support working memory

Play I went to the supermarket and I bought.... Trying to remember what has been bought previously

Word chain.

Choose a topic, such as food. The first person says a word, the second person says that word plus his own, the third person says the first two words plus her own, and so forth, continue until someone can no longer remember the word chain.

Play What's missing?

Place 10 items from your purse on the table in front of you. Have kids try to memorize items for 10 seconds. While their eyes are closed remove 1-3 items. After opening their eyes, children try to remember what is missing.

Sing Heads, shoulders, knees and toes, or any other songs. Toddlers are natural singers and it is great practice for exercising their memory! So simple and entertaining.

Coin match.

Set up a line of coins. Start with 3 and work up to 10. Place the coins in a random pattern of heads or tails. Child stares at coins for 10 seconds. Parent removes coins and hands to child who attempts to arrange them in the same order. Make this more difficult by using different types of coins.

Three cups.

Line up three paper cups. Place a small object under one cup. While child watches closely, switch the cups back and forth into new positions. Ask the child where the object is.

What did I change?

Have your child take stock of what you look like then close their eyes. Change one thing about your appearance, such as untie a shoe, take off one earring, etc. Child opens eyes and tries to identify what changed.