

Addressing Barriers to Comprehensive Training

Access for Clients with Coexisting Cognitive Disorders

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PRIDE Program

- Individuals who are:
 - Blind or visually impaired
 - Have combined vision and hearing loss
- Primary components:
 - Assistive Technology
 - Orientation and Adjustment to Disability
 - Adaptive Living Skills
 - Orientation and Mobility
 - Career Exploration and Readiness Training

Key Learning Outcomes

- Have a greater understanding of how a cognitive disability may impact client access to comprehensive training programs.
- Identify accommodations that can be implemented to address access concerns.
- Gain insight into the importance of identifying, understanding, and addressing coexisting disorders.

Cognitive Disabilities

Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

- No two injuries are the exact same
- Can affect all aspects of cognitive functioning
 - Language
 - Memory
 - Paying attention
 - Problem solving
 - Abstract thinking
 - Behavior/personality
 - Seeing
 - Hearing

Intellectual Disability

- Significant limitation in:
 - Intellectual functioning
 - Adaptive behavior
 - Conceptual Skills
 - Language and Literacy
 - Social Skills
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Social Responsibility
 - Practical Skills
 - Occupational Skills
 - Schedules/routines

Source: [American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Up to 84% also have an anxiety disorder
- Symptoms can vary significantly
 - Deficits in social communication and interaction
 - Reading others' emotions
 - Appropriate contextual behavior
 - Back-and-forth conversations
 - Restricted, repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities
 - Closely focused interests
 - Strict routines
 - Changes to sensory processing

Anxiety Disorder

- Potential symptoms include:
 - Feeling on-edge and irritable
 - Easily fatigued
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Having headaches
 - Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
 - Having sleep problems

Functional Issues and Accommodations

Building Blocks

- Build a positive, trusting relationship
 - Know their story – history, family, culture, etc
- Teach to the client
 - Abilities
 - Interests/purpose
- Expect challenges
- Patience, patience, patience

Memory

- Complications
 - Notetaking may be different
 - Need to learn complex programs or tasks
 - Memorize key locations on a keyboard
 - Memorize keyboard commands for screen reader

Memory – Accommodations 1

- Do not expect them to remember something the first time
- Repetition
- Take notes throughout session
 - Use best method for client: Computer, tablet, phone, recorder, paper, etc
 - Set the expectation that they will not remember
- Use reminder apps and timers
- Written instructions

Memory – Accommodations 2

- Break things down into steps
 - Build task analysis skills
 - Can be as detailed as needed
- Check in regularly
 - Ask them to explain in their own words
- Memory games
- Slow down screen readers

Motivation

- Complications
 - Sensory loss often involves a grieving process
 - Feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness
 - Clients may be unaware of career options
 - Some clients are very reliant on outside help
 - Reluctance to gain independence

Motivation – Accommodations 1

- Talk to the client
 - Reminders of purpose
- Set up a reward system
 - Reward varies by client: snack, music, funny videos, dance
 - Change reward as needed
 - May need to be for basic behaviors

Motivation – Accommodations 2

- Task may be too difficult
 - Break it down into smaller steps
 - Try something else

Don't think of this as laziness – it's a cognitive difference that needs accommodation

Concentration/Focus

- Complications
 - Filtering sensory inputs
 - Focusing on screen reader feedback
- Accommodations
 - Keep content engaging and relevant
 - No independent work
 - Take breaks
 - Open communication about need for a break
 - Reward system
 - Slow down screen readers

Focus – Accommodations 1

- May rush through a task without mastery
 - Break task down
 - Explain why each step is important
- Figure out stimulation needs
 - More: Background music, fidget toys, yoga ball chair, etc
 - Less: Headphones, shut door, dim lights, etc.

Focus – Accommodations 2

- When focus shifts
 - Engage briefly, then redirect
 - Set boundaries
- Avoid large amounts of text
 - Activities and physical movement
 - Role play
- Ask why they're struggling
- Be prepared to not last the entire session

Processing Speed

- Complications
 - Absorbing a TON of new information
 - May be learning new ways of thinking
 - Clients may also be communicating in a method that is new to them
 - Requires processing the language first and then the actual information second

Processing Speed – Accommodations 1

- Take your time
 - Explain concepts slowly
 - Stop frequently to discuss and check understanding
 - It's okay to not understand
 - Extra time to get things done
 - Give time to process their thoughts
- Break down tasks
- Solve problem together

Processing Speed – Accommodations 2

- Use simple workarounds if able
- Use concrete information
 - Show don't tell
 - Give real life examples
 - Use pictures and videos
- Use short bullet points
- Be prepared to answer many questions

Anxiety

- Complications
 - This is to be expected for people new to vision or hearing loss
 - Learning to function without one of your senses can be frightening
 - Everything already feels new
 - Clients may be anxious to understand a lesson and often jump into a task without listening to the instructor's directions

Anxiety – Accommodations 1

- Pair with other clients
- Provide affirmation
- Make sessions relaxed and positive
- Provide an agenda
 - Others may prefer one thing at a time
- Build coping skills
 - Breathing and grounding exercises
 - Solve problems together
- Figure out stimulation needs
- Breaks as needed

Anxiety – Accommodations 2

- Can be specific to new, unfamiliar tasks or things
 - Instructor does the task first
 - New tasks as part of regular routine
 - Describe what to expect
 - Be very concrete with directions
 - Familiarize client with smaller, less overwhelming parts before the whole
 - Break down tasks

Anger and Frustration

- Complications
 - Many previous symptoms can be additive
 - Disabilities are not always accommodated well
 - Etiquette
 - Relearning a skill that felt natural

Anger/Frustration – Accommodations 1

- Set boundaries
 - Appropriate way to communicate and behave
 - Appropriate topics of discussion
- Talk through the issue
 - Client has a right to their feelings
 - Plan for an “unfinished business” discussion
 - Put a time limit on discussion

Anger/Frustration – Accommodations 2

- Address issues immediately
 - Be up front about behavior and why it's a problem
 - Role play situations
 - Make sure client knows rights and responsibilities
- Work on coping mechanisms for anger
- Remind client of larger goal
- Take breaks

General Advice 1

- Be prepared to treat every day as a new day – what worked before may not work again
 - Can't be prepared for every situation
 - Try new things
- Accept limits
 - Meet client where they are
 - A task you expect to be simple may not be
 - May need to give up on task completely

General Advice 2

- Instructors should meet regularly to exchange ideas
 - Talk about what is working and what is not
 - One instructor may be seeing something others are not
 - Bring in experienced instructors for knowledge and perspective
 - You can't do everything – stay within the limits of your expertise

General Advice 3

- Prioritize autonomy
 - Speak to client directly when there's a problem
 - Come up with suggestions together
 - Give options
- Speak to family/guardians (if appropriate)
 - May see barriers the client does not or forgets
- Be aware of issues outside of sessions

General Advice 4

- Check in at the beginning of each session
- Pay attention to patterns
- Be okay with being wrong
- Be okay with being unsuccessful

Phone Applications

- Task Management and Reminder Apps
 - Remember the Milk
 - Microsoft To Do
 - Google Keep
 - Twobird
 - Todoist
 - Any.do
- Timer Apps
 - MultiTimer (Android)
 - Focus Keeper (Android)
 - Focus (Apple)
 - Be Focused (Apple)
 - Engross

Thank you!

Questions or Comments?

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