

**Supporting Memory Systems at Home: Information for parents/carers**

Memory systems are important, not only in relation to academic learning but also for lots of life skills – remembering a shopping list, preparing a roast dinner and remembering passwords for a computer at work or online shopping!

# **Different types of memory system**

We use our **short-term** memories to hold information for a few seconds – for example, to remember a phone-number or email address whilst writing it down or typing it into a phone. Where we then **use** or **apply** this short-term information – such as adding up a list of numbers or working out where we are in a set of instructions to determine which is the next step – we are using our **working memory** systems.

Working memory is important as not only does it support our responses to information/instructions, but it also enables us to **focus** and **concentrate** our attention as well as organising how we arrange information and **transfer** it to the longer-term memory systems.

About 10% of people have difficulties with working memory; this figure is much higher for people with specific learning differences such as **Dyslexia**, Dyspraxia or ADHD.

Typically, a person with Dyslexia is likely to find it harder to retain and respond to **verbal** input such as speech. **Visual** input is often easier for them to retain and can work well to **support** verbal input. In other words, it’s helpful to support learners with something to look at to remind them of what they’ve heard.

Working memory systems are sometimes described as the **‘post-it’ notes** used by the brain – only a little information can be recorded and it’s only for a few seconds. The amount of information varies from person to person and also within the individual at different times/in different circumstances.



# **Ideas for supporting memory systems**

* Remember – post-it notes are small, so only give **small chunks** of information/instructions at a time.
* Post-it notes can easily get lost, so be prepared to give a **reminder** of information/instructions – your child doesn’t choose to forget.
* Keep instructions **short** and **simple** so that your child has less content to retain and process.
* Ask your child to **repeat** these short, simple instructions back to you – this builds in an additional reminder and enables you to check what your child thinks that you’ve just said…
* **Making connections** to other learning and experiences helps with storing new learning tidily in the brain where it can be found and used again. So, if you’re looking at a literacy task with your child, remind them what they worked on last.
* Make it **memorable**! Humour is great for boosting the memory so make a funny story including the items on a shopping list or the order of tasks for getting ready for bed. Sets of instructions can have a rhythm added for emphasis – you could add a melody if you’re feeling creative!
* Make it **personal**! Linking to other memories/experiences is a great way to cement learning, so encourage your child to make connections to people/places/events that have meaning for them. For example, when working on the ‘ea’ in words like ‘beach’ refer back to a trip to the beach.
* If your child is working on reading/spelling specific words, encourage them to use different **colours** to pick out and reinforce different sections – perhaps the tricky bit, or a ‘silent letter’ that keeps being forgotten (thum**b**), or one colour for verbs (doing words) and another for nouns (objects, people and places).

# **More ideas for supporting memory systems**

* **Applying** a new piece of information/learning helps us to store and find that new learning again another time, so try to put new learning to work – spotting a word/letter pattern in a book, an advert on TV, a WhatsApp message from Grandma and so on.
* It’s helpful to **‘check in’** with your child if they are trying to remember or work on a set of instructions – so ask them, “What do you need to do now?” – this is useful for errands around the house as well as work-based tasks.
* Add something **kinaesthetic** (to do with movement or touch) to reinforce sets of instructions – so for a 3-part set of instructions, encourage your child to touch a finger (or fold a finger down) for each instruction so that there is a physical connection to each part of the input.
* Be aware that everyone finds it more difficult to use their memory systems efficiently when they are feeling **stressed** and/or **tired**, so break things down even more and build in extra reminders.



* You can play **games** to encourage good use of the memory – Kim’s Game (child looks at objects on a tray, adult secretly takes one away for child to work out) or shopping list type games – “I went to the shops and I bought……” to build up retaining and repeating sequences of information. The shopping list game can be ‘modernised’ or adapted to suit the individual – perhaps, “I went to [name of favourite clothes shop] and I bought….” or even shopping for football teams or players!



* Enjoy giving your own memory a **work-out**! Do you use strategies to support your memory systems? Compare notes with your child – this encourages thinking about how to focus on memory skills and establishing what are effective strategies.