

9 Tips for helping a child with processing difficulties

1. Allow time, time and more time.

Children with slow processing speed are not lazy, they just process at a slower pace. This means they need more time to understand lessons, take quizzes and complete work outside of school. Everything from reading a book to following instructions can take longer. That's why it's important they be given as much time as they need.

2. Repeat instructions and task directions.

Directions are particularly difficult to process as they require understanding and holding multiple pieces of information in working memory, long enough for them to be acted upon. Not only is repetition key, but when possible involve multiple senses to help the child understand what is required. That means reading directions aloud, showing charts and diagrams and even finished examples of work.

3. Provide outlines and summaries of lessons.

Dealing with too many details at once can cause cognitive overload for the child with slow processing speed. Teachers can help by providing summaries that highlight the main ideas and gist of a lesson and allow students to understand the big picture, before tackling the more detailed points.

3. Encourage overlearning.

Some children may feel silly reading the same thing over and over again but this kind of overlearning may be exactly what it takes for the child with slow processing speed to understand a set of directions. The same goes for repeating a lesson until it can be understood. Computers are great tools in this respect, as an activity can be taken as many times as the child needs to master the material.

4. Get them to work it out on paper or with concrete materials.

Trying to juggle multiple pieces of information in their head can greatly overwhelm the child with slow processing speed. It can cause him or her to quickly become frustrated with a task. Luckily, many problem solving activities at school, particularly where math skills are concerned, lend themselves to working on paper or working with concrete materials.

5. One question at a time.

When students are completing a worksheet or taking an exam that presents multiple questions on the same page, cover up all but the question being worked on. The child might do this with his or her hand or a blank piece of paper that can be moved along as they work. This will make it easier to focus on the information that is being requested and to start a task that can seem overwhelming at first glance.

6. Shorten assignments.

These children may make more mistakes simply because their brains are already strained by having to process the task at hand. Concentrating and reducing their workload can allow them to invest

more time in providing quality work. After all, there's only so much time in the day and children with slow processing tend to run out of it quickly!

7. Give grades for knowledge vs. performance.

A child with slow processing speed may not be able to complete the same amount of work as his or her peers. For example, it will take him longer to compose open answer items and mental stamina can give way to frustration if he is expected to generate complex responses. That's why it's important to evaluate him based on what he has learned vs. how much he can do.

8. Allow assignments to be completed on a computer.

Many similarities have been observed between dysgraphia, which causes difficulty in handwriting, and slow processing. Children may struggle with understanding the way a letter is written and the necessary spacing. This can really slow a child down given the amount of tasks they are required to handwrite in elementary school. Using a computer and learning to type automatizes the writing process so ideas are translated into words via muscle memory in the hands. This reduces the potential distraction caused by the physical act of forming letters. It also gives children access to spell-checkers.

9. Minimize background noise at school.

As with children who have ADD and ADHD, it may help to place a child with slow processing speed close to the front of the classroom so they can concentrate their attention and focus on what is being said. Visual noise in the form of busy bulletin boards should also be avoided if possible.

Above all, provide plenty of encouragement and support. It may sound like a given but these children need patience, understanding and time in order to be successful!