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Practical Cognitive Strategies For Brain Injury Survivors

Presentation and Discussion
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THE "OLD ME" vs. THE "NEW ME"



The ways you used to do things might not work as consistently for you anymore. After a brain injury, as difficult as it may be, it is important to

GET TO KNOW THE "NEW YOU"!

You want to learn how to do things in new ways, that still allow you to be successful.

HOW I WAS BEFORE THE INJURY "THE OLD ME"	HOW I AM SINCE THE INJURY "THE NEW ME"
I can REMEMBER anything (without any notes)	I can't remember (and have no idea where I put my notes!)
I do multiple things at once (MULTI-TASKING)	I have to do one thing at a time.
I am a FAST thinker and a FAST talker	I have to do everything SLOWLY!





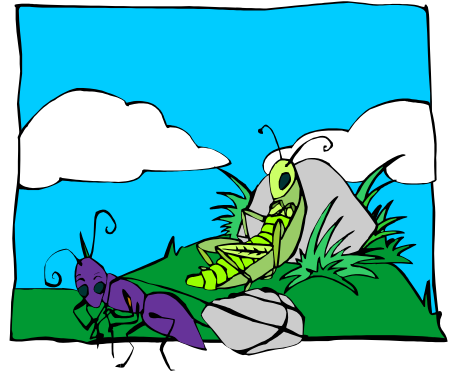
MAKE THE BEST CHOICE FOR THE “NEW ME” TO BE SUCCESSFUL!

STICKING WITH THE OLD ME DOES NOT WORK ANYMORE ↓	LEARNING NEW WAYS FOR THE NEW ME TO BE SUCCESSFUL ↓
1. I never used to write things down. ↓	1. I cannot remember things without notes anymore ↓
2. So, I try to remember information in my head like I used to do. ↓	2. So, I write info down for myself. ↓
3. This feels good, because it feels like I am the Old Me....sort of ↓	3. I feel badly because I hate having to do things differently, because it reminds me that I am no longer the OLD ME. ↓
4. Oops! But, I forget the information. ↓	4. But, my new ways help me to REMEMBER the information! ↓
5. So, I really was not successful. ↓	5. So, I am SUCCESSFUL! ↓
6. This feels bad!	6. This feels GOOD! 😊

BEING AUTOMATIC

vs.

BEING DELIBERATE

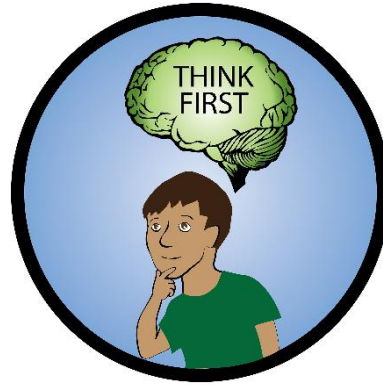
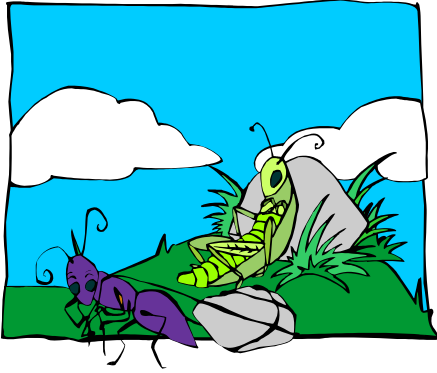


AUTOMATIC

- ❖ Doing things on “**Automatic**” = going through an activity without thinking much about it.
- ❖ For example, most of us can get a drink of water or brush our teeth on “Auto-Pilot”.
 - After a Brain Injury, when you do things on “Automatic,” you may **forget steps** or **lose important information**

BEING DELIBERATE

- ❖ Doing things “**Deliberately**” = taking care on each step, so you don’t make mistakes.
- ❖ For example, following a new recipe or building a shelf-unit requires step-by-step action
 - After a Brain Injury, you will perform better if you are deliberate about your actions
 - If you take careful, deliberate, step-by-step actions, you will lay down new pathways of learning in your brain.
 - When you practice being deliberate in your actions, those actions will become more automatic for you. Really...



HOW TO GET STARTED IN BEING DELIBERATE

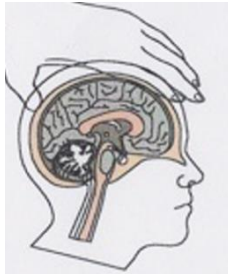
Pick one thing you want to get better at doing. Then:

1. Stop and think about the activity you want to accomplish.
2. Set up a plan, including a written list of steps to follow.
3. Follow your plan and pay deliberate attention to each step
4. Check off each step as you complete it.
5. Look over your list and the result of your actions, to make sure you have completed the task.
6. If something is missing, fix it!
7. Then re-check your list again and the result of your deliberate efforts.
8. Try the plan for one week. Slowly! Really do it the same way each day.
9. Evaluate the results. What worked? What did not work?
10. Change the plan if the first one had parts that did not work.

For example, you can write a list like this to keep in the bathroom, and do the same for other wash-up activities like shaving and showering:

BRUSHING TEETH

1. Get toothbrush wet
2. Put on toothpaste
3. Brush top right teeth
4. Brush top left teeth
5. Brush bottom left teeth
6. Brush bottom right teeth
7. Spit and rinse
8. Clean off toothbrush
9. Put toothbrush away



WARNING! WATCH OUT FOR OVERLOAD!

- ❖ It takes a lot of energy to think through every little step to accomplish a task.
- ❖ This is why you may become overloaded and exhausted very quickly.
- ❖ Be ready to take a break between tasks, or even between steps in a task.
- ❖ This brings us to comparing our brain to a sponge.

What can we do if our brain gets overloaded?

You can pour water onto a sponge. At some point, the sponge becomes full, and the water starts to run off.

If you want the sponge to hold more water, you have to squeeze it out.

CONVERSATION
MUSIC
MATH
CLASS LECTURE
VISUAL INPUT
BODY LANGUAGE
WORRIES
TOUCH
WRITING

The brain is like a sponge. When too much information is poured into it, it becomes **OVERLOADED** with information.

To "squeeze out" the brain, take a break or change the activity. Then the brain will be able to absorb more information again.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ATTENTION / CONCENTRATION



- Tell yourself what you are paying attention to
- Reduce distractions from the TV, music, and other people
- Notice when you start lose your focus
- Take a short break and do something different for awhile
- Decide when you are ready to return to that task
- Come back & continue that task
- Next time, challenge yourself to increase your attention to that task

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING



MEMORY / RETENTION



- Write appointments, classes, and social activities in a **weekly or monthly calendar**.
 - Look at the calendar every morning and before you go to bed
 - Put your activities onto a **daily schedule** of what to accomplish each day.
 - Include a realistic amount of time between tasks for preparation & travel
- Have a **checklist** of all the items you need to have with you, & all the steps to complete your multi-step tasks.
 - Check off each step after you finish it, to remember that you did it.
- Keep a list of your doctors and therapists in your calendar, information binder, &/or address book
 - Use this list for easy reference when you need to contact those professionals
- Use a notebook / binder to keep track of each appointment
 - Before each appointment, **write down your questions & what you want to accomplish** with that professional
 - Have those notes with you at the appointment
 - Write in the date of your appointment
 - Write down what the professional tells you in response to your questions
 - Write what the professional wants you to do next, to follow up on your appointment.
 - Review the notes with the professional, to make sure you have the information correctly recorded
 - Review the information again at home to keep it in your memory

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING



ORGANIZATION



- **Keep things in the same place** so you and the people who live with can find them more easily. (Keys, wallet, bills, tools, medicine, notes, etc.)
 - Put **labels** on drawers, cabinets & shelves, to remind you what goes in each place. Do not put other things in those locations
 - **Take the time** to put things back in these designated locations.
- Put papers in **well-labeled file folders**.
 - Keep the file folders in an accordion-file or a file cabinet.
 - Keep a list with the names of those files at the front of those files.
 - Before an appointment, get any of the files you need to bring with you
 - Put the files back in the accordion or file cabinet when done with it
- **Do things in the same way** to make them a routine.
 - Use checklists to do things thoroughly and in the best order.
 - Make sure you have everything you need to finish each step.
 - Be deliberate by talking yourself through with each step

CATEGORIES OF MY LIFE

1. Write out the date that you are working on your categories because your list will probably be changing as your life continues to evolve. The categories may change and the details within each category will definitely change.
2. Make the categories your own. Your initial list does not need to be absolutely complete. You can always add to the list as you start to do some of the activities.

As of _____
date

Grooming/Personal Care
Medical/Medicine/Doctor's Appointments
Therapy Appointments/Exercises/Work-Outs
Meals (Shopping/Cooking/Clean-Up)
House Chores (Laundry, Cleaning, Pet Care ...)
Yard Chores (Watering, Maintenance...)
Financial (Banking, Insurance, Paying Bills...)
Work/Productive Activity
Hobbies/Creative Pursuits
Relationships (Family/Friends/Groups...) (Birthdays/Social Events/Meetings...)
Spirituality/Rituals

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



Use your “Categories of Your Life”, your monthly calendar, and your weekly schedule to get things done.

- Sit down and use this form to help you think about all of the “**Categories of Your Life**”. Decide which categories are relevant for you.
- Take a few minutes each week to “**brainstorm**” the things you want to accomplish in each category. Some of these will be the same from week to week. Look at what you did this past week to help you think about what you might want to accomplish next week.
- Take one category at a time and mark the activities by their priority. Highlight the **most important** activities as your “**A**” List.
 - These are the things to be done each day or this week.
 - Use a weekly schedule to record the day and time to do your “A” List items. Make sure to include any appointments or any other scheduled events that you might have on your calendar.
 - Use this schedule during your week and mark off when you have completed each item on your “A” List
- Items that need to be done in 2 weeks will be your “B” List
- Items that need to be done in a month will be your “C: List.
- Schedule a time each weekend to review all of the things on your “Categories of Your Life” list, and revise your priority list of “A’s”, “B’s”, and “C’s” for the following week.
 - Write out your schedule for the next week with these priorities

- Use your watch or phone to set an alarm that will go off every 30 minutes to help remind you to check your schedule and initiate what needs to be done.
- Reward yourself for finishing tasks by crossing them off with your **favorite color highlighter** when you are done with each of them.
- If you find you cannot accomplish all that you thought you could, you may want to:
 - put fewer things on each day's schedule
 - give yourself more time to get something done.
 - ask for some help
 - do things in a different order.
- Learn to **PACE YOURSELF**, so you do not use too much energy at one time and drain yourself down to nothing.
- **BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF.** It often takes months of small changes to make your systems work for you.
 - With practice, you will have a system that will work for a lifetime.