

Teaching the Concept of Time

Many individuals can “tell time” but have difficulty “managing time.” What may be underlying this is their difficulty in understanding the “concept of time.”

Difficulties in understanding the concept of time may lead to difficulties with:

- Sequencing events and tasks
- Remembering events, directions, instructions in correct order
- Moving from task to task or classroom to classroom
- Shifting attention from one subject, task or activity to another
- Adhering to curfews, deadlines, schedules and commitments
- Budgeting time (cannot predicate how long an activity will take or allocate the appropriate amount of time to complete an activity)
- Inappropriate timing of tasks (may start an activity that takes a long time to complete when the family is leaving in five minutes).
- Tardiness or procrastination
- “loose track of time” (Richard Lavoie)
- Completing multi-step tasks (long math problems, complex instructions, relating stories)

Before time management can be taught, the individual must have some sense of the concept of time.

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This information was researched by staff of RFECY and is adapted from: Lavoie, Richard. 2005. It's So Much Work to be Your Friend. A touchstone Book, Simon Schuster, Toronto.

Goldberg, Donna. 2005. The Organized Student. “A Fireside Book”, Simon and Schuster Special Sales, New York.

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Strategies to teach the concept of time (but not necessarily in the following order):

- Use an analog clock (one with a face). Digital clocks teach “here and now” time without any reference to past or future time.
- Teach the concepts of “before”, “after”, “later”, “long ago”, “once upon a time”, “until”, and “next”, to learn about time frames.
- Teach “yesterday”, today” and “tomorrow” to learn specific periods of time.

- Teach “past”, “present” and “future” to learn broader concepts of time.
- Teach the sequence of days and months.
- Teach the names of the months as well as their numerical order, for example, May is the fifth month and can be written as the number 5 (they mean the same thing).
- Teach that 6:45 is the same as quarter to seven or 15 minutes to seven. (This helps teach the passage of time.)
- Teach what a.m. and p.m. mean.
- Use timers to help the individual understand the passage of time during a task or while waiting.
- Use an analog watch with a second hand and ask the individual to time him or you at various activities for 1 second.
- Teach how to count each second in increments of “one-one hundred, two-one hundred, three-one hundred”.
- Have the individual time other events, for example, her favourite song, how long it takes to eat a meal.
- Ask the individual to remind you after five minutes (or a half hour) has passed because you need this reminder to do something important.
- Have the individual estimate how long a task or event will take. Time this task or event and compare the two (actual time and estimated time).

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- Make sure you are accurate in your use of time language. If you say you are leaving in five minutes, leave in five minutes.
- Be aware of how long an activity takes and plan accordingly. For example if a video game takes thirty minutes be aware of how long “one more” takes. Explain that the individual may or may not have time to have “one more”.
- Use time in your directions to the individual. For example, “In twenty minutes it will be time to wash your hands for supper.”

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