In The Classroom

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Academic Accommodations to Minimize Frustration

Description of the problem

Aggressive or confrontational behavior, whether physical or verbal, is disruptive to the daily classroom routine, making it difficult for all to learn, and in the worst cases can cause risks to the health and safety of the student and to others. Uncontrolled behavioral difficulties commonly result in lost opportunities to develop positive relationships with others, and can result in removal from the classroom.

Causes

Students with TBI can be easily frustrated with academic tasks. Many students with brain injury get upset with the perceived disparity between what they could do prior to injury and what they can do after their injury. They also have difficulty with the differences between their abilities and those of their peers. The combination of the neurological effects of brain injury and the feelings of loss and frustration often result in difficulties controlling behavior when under stress, as is the case when academic work is challenging.

Solution

Provide instruction that minimizes errors, which can provoke negative behaviors and interfere with learning. In addition, teach strategies for identifying and managing situations that might result in problems before they emerge.

Strategies

- **Success is key**
  Start each activity with a task the student can do successfully.

  Example: If you are teaching 2-step multiplication as a new lesson, start the lesson with a review of 1-step multiplication that you know the student has mastered.

- **Break apart tasks**
  Break larger tasks into smaller steps to create small successes along the way.

  Example: If your student struggles with maintaining focus but needs to take a long test, break the test into sections that you know your student can complete. Put each section on its own piece of paper.

- **Use a systematic process for each task**
  It is important that students completely understand what they are being asked to do. Using a systematic process for each task will help your student to complete the task.

  •Provide clear examples of what each step of the task will require in order to complete it successfully.
  •Model the entire sequence of steps, step-by-step.
  •Verbally review the steps with the student and have him/her verbalize each step before beginning.
  •Provide specific and meaningful feedback after the student completes each step.
  •Ask the student how they thought they did and if they need any help.
  •Continually re-evaluate with the student the next set of achievable steps.

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Strategies continued

- **Encourage self-monitoring**
  For some students, self-monitoring does not come naturally. Support students by scaffolding their self-monitoring.

  Example: Try asking one of the following:
  - How do you think you are doing?
  - What's working or not working for you?
  - Is this task easy, difficult or just right?
  - When do you think you will need help?

- **Make a plan for help**
  Include how everyone will know the student needs help and what exactly help will look like.

  Example: If your student needs help frequently, but does not like to draw attention by raising their hand, teach them to place their pencil at the corner of their desk when they need help. You and the student will know the signal, but no one else will.

- **Establish minimum work requirements**
  Establish minimum work requirements and steps for achieving goals in collaboration with the student.

  Example: Specific time limits, such as "You must complete five problems in 10 minutes" tend to generate oppositional responses. Instead, ask the student, "How many problems do you think you can complete in 10 minutes?" Then re-evaluate this goal and provide positive support.

- **Teach students phrases**
  These phrases can be used as escape valves when they feel pressured.

  Example: "I need a break" or "I'm starting to feel overwhelmed." Then reward students for using a phrase rather than waiting until they start to lose control.

- **Make use of all available resources**
  Counseling, support staff and physical tools such as organizers can help accommodate the student's other brain-injury-related challenges and thereby minimize the frustration and discouragement that frequently get acted out in aggressive ways.

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Attention

Description of the problem

Attention-related problems are common among students with traumatic brain injuries. Often, students can be disorganized, impulsive, have poor time orientation, and have trouble learning from the consequences of their behavior.

Causes

Following a TBI, students frequently report problems with concentration, distractibility, and short attention span. These problems can be directly related to the students brain injury, either because of damage to the frontal lobes which can result in poor attentional control, or because of widespread brain damage, which can lead to slow inefficient processing.

Solution

Use student training and environmental supports to help students manage their attention so they can benefit from instruction.

Strategies

- **Provide stable routines.**

  Provide stable routines by creating consistent schedules for classroom activities. Keeping activities at the same time creates a sense of predictability, allowing students to focus on the tasks at hand rather than the routine .

  - Keep routines brief and easy to remember. For complex routines, provide written or pictured cues for each step.
  - Prepare the students for changes in routines.

  Example: Since the first day of school Mrs. Gordon has been teaching her class the routine to arrive at school. There are four steps that are written on the board outside the classroom. #1. Say good morning to Mrs. Gordon. #2. Put your lunch in the bin. #3. Put away your backpack. #4. Start your desk activity. Sam, who has a brain injury, has an individualized desk activity that has been taught to him and reviewed.

- **Provide specific assignments within larger tasks.**

  A bigger task can be broken down into smaller assignments which should also have a defined start and end date or a deadline for completion. For tasks that require sustained attention, giving students small tasks to help maintain attention can be useful.

  Example: Give the student something specific to listen for in a listening task. For example, in a class read aloud, the student with attention struggles could be asked to listen for the name of the dog in the story. If the task is watching a video, provide written questions ahead of time so the student can follow along.

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Strategies continued

- **Provide interesting and engaging classroom activities.**

  When a student is interested and engaged in the material being presented, their attention can be students to draw connections to their own life experiences and situations. Change teaching techniques often to maintain student attention.

  Example: If your lesson plan goal for math period is to have students understand 1/2, 1/4, 1/3 and a whole as fractions explain the concept and then provide students with a hands on activity in which they manipulate an object into the desired fractions. Let each student make their own real life con nection by asking them to share examples of how fractions are used in their daily lives.

- **Use redirection strategies.**

  Redirection can range from physically or verbally directing a student back to his desk and restarting the activity to providing a verbal or printed printed cue. Be careful not to reinforce off-task behavior. If a student wants (consciously or unconsciously) to escape the task at hand, time out will reinforce the negative behavior.

  Example: Tape a printed card that says "focus" to the student's desk. Talk with the student about when, how and why you will use it, then practice. When the student is off task, you can walk over to his desk and point to the card, or use a tap on the hand that signals he should read it.
  Make a tally sheet the student can tape to her desk. When the student is focused, make a check on a tally sheet---or have the student set a quiet timer and if they are on task when it goes off, they give themselves a tally.

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Classroom Routines

Description of the problem

Typical students come to school with a set of skills to navigate classroom and school events. Often, Students who have brain injuries lack many of these essential skills for school success and can benefit from highly structured classroom routines and additional routines to manage the complexity of the classroom setting.

Strategies

Students with brain injury need more instruction to learn classroom routines.

There are several options for ensuring that students with brain injury learn routines well**.**

Option 1: Spend more time teaching the whole class and go over the routine as a group everyday. This option supports the entire class.

Option 2: Provide the child with the brain injury with extra individualized practice. This may be the best option when the whole class is doing well with the routine, while the student with a brain injury needs more practice.

Either of these options will be effective because they provide the student with TBI with the needed practice to learn the routine, and they do not draw attention to the student with the brain injury.

It is important to teach new routines in the setting where they are needed and specific to each situation.

Students with brain injury do not generalize new learning across situations. All routines will need to be taught in the setting where that are needed and specific to each situation.

Every teacher has different routines in their classroom. One teacher wants homework turned in at the end of the class period while another wants it turned in at the beginning of class. These differences make it important for students to practice routines in the setting they will actually be expected to perform the routines.

Providing regular review of classroom routines can help students with brain injury.

Because many students who have brain injuries struggle with memory, they will need frequent and supervised opportunities to practice routines. Reviewing the routine verbally can help, but it is also important to physically practice the routine many times.

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Students with brain injury will need more reminders that other students.

Students with brain injury may not remember routines from one day to the next. It can be helpful to gently remind students of the expected behavior on a daily basis.

Example of daily reminders: Where to put belongings, how to ask for help, how to collect their things, what page number to turn to, use a pencil in math class not a pen, etc.

Additional routines that may be needed for students with brain injury

- Social routines may be needed to help the student practice appropriate social interactions.

  Example: The student says good morning to you as they enter the classroom.

- Problem solving routines may be needed to help the student navigate problems that arise throughout the school day.

  Example: For every problem follow these 4 steps to solve it:

  1. Determine what the exact problem is
  2. List your options to solve it
  3. Choose an option
  4. Put your choice into action

- Routines to manage anger and frustration may be needed to help the student manage themselves.

  Example: When you feel yourself feeling frustrated or angry, touch your nose and I will know you need a break and will allow you one.

Sample List of Classroom Routines

Regular Classroom Routines	Student with a TBI
Ask the class to line up for recess.	Before it is time to line up for recess, remind the class where the line forms and that each student should wait until their row is called.
During the first week of school ask students to sharpen their pencils at the beginning and end of the class.	Before class, remind everyone to sharpen their pencil. Have extras ready for the student with TBI just in case.
At the start of the school year, tell students to put their lunch box in the basket when they come into class.	Greet all students as they enter the room and remind them where to put their lunch box and backpack.
At the start of the school year, tell students to put their homework in the homework box.	At the beginning of class, remind students where the homework box is and tell them to make sure they put today's homework there.
Periodically throughout the school year remind students to raise their hand to ask a question.	Daily, many times, remind all students to raise their hand when they have a question. Do not answer unless their hand is raised. Praise students for raising their hand with questions.

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Friendship and Peer Acceptance

Description of the problem

Students with TBI have difficulty maintaining friendships. This is one of the most common and devastating consequences of significant brain injury. The resulting social isolation compounds feelings of loss, sadness and depression in students with TBI.

Causes

Childhood and adolescence are challenging social worlds to navigate in the best of times. TBI is scary; in a single moment a friend's life has changed forever. Damage to the brain has potentially left him limited physically, mentally and emotionally. Few children or adolescents have the mental or emotional resources to process the implications for their own sense of stability and safety in the world and struggle to maintain a friendship with the affected person.

The Complexity of the Issue

Loss of old friends may be largely inevitable. Watching a friend recover from any significant loss, even without long-term disability is beyond the social and emotional capabilities of most adolescents and children. It's important to help students with TBI understand that their old friends aren't rejecting them as much as they are running away from ideas too big and scary to handle. However, many adolescents and children are capable of developing new reciprocal friendships with people of any ability.

Solution

Help students with TBI maintain what friendships they can and replace those that will inevitably end by providing structures of support.

Strategies

- **Prepare peers**

  Before the student with TBI returns to your classroom, prepare the rest of your class for what to expect.

  - Consult with the student's parents about what to say and, if possible, have the family be part of the presentation.
  - Keep the details specific to the student and the accommodations the student will have (note-taker, rest periods, etc.).
  - If you know the student has significant challenges in social competence, (impulse control, ability to read situations or the emotions of others, etc.) explain them as a result of the brain injury and suggest strategies peers can use to accommodate the injured student.

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Strategies continued

- **Peer volunteers**

  Use peer volunteers to help the student with TBI and also provide valuable social interaction.

  - Peer volunteers can help the student navigate busy corridors, carry book and materials and complete assignments.
  - Peer volunteers should be selected from a social set acceptable to the student with brain injury.
  - True friendships are reciprocal; both volunteers and students with brain injury need to be prepared to both give and receive in their interactions.

- **Schedules**

  Use schedules to promote social interaction. Sometimes students spend significant parts of the school day separated from their peers. Keep students in situations that promote positive social interaction, as much as possible.

  Example: If it is not absolutely necessary, don't remove the student with TBI from mainstream classes. Instead, put accommodations in place in the regular classroom.

- **Build new friendships**

  Help students build new friendships by creating opportunities for your student to interact with new people, students who are new to the school or just students from other social groups.

  Example: A former athlete can do speech therapy as part of choir practice and get to know a whole new group of friends.

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Generalization

Description of the problem

When a child masters a particular skill in one setting it does not necessarily mean that they can use that same skill in a different setting or at a different time. For example, a student may know that when she needs to ask a question in math class, she needs to raise her hand and wait to be called on. However, when she is in the library and has a question, she does not transfer this learning and may just sit there not knowing what to do. The transfer of learning (generalization) from one setting to the next is not always automatic for students with brain injuries.

Causes

The parts of the brain that control memory and facilitate transfer of learning are frequently damaged in a TBI. Loss of ability in many areas such as decision-making skills, problem solving and memory can make generalizing learning very difficult.

Solution

Incorporate strategies that facilitate transfer of learning (generalization) into everyday teaching.

Strategies

- **Teach skills in multiple settings and situations.**

  If you're trying to teach a student to ask for help before she is hopelessly frustrated and out of control, work with her when she's doing something difficult in a variety of situations. A respected rule in instruction with students with learning challenges is that new behaviors or skills must be taught in at least three different settings, with at least three different people, and in the context of at least three different activities.

  Example: To teach a student to raise his hand in all of his classes, practice this skill in each different classroom, with each different teacher, and during different times throughout the class.

- **Have students practice teaching others**

  Teaching a skill is an excellent way to master it, as many teachers know from experience. Providing ways for students to explain or teach a skill to each other or to family members can facilitate their mastery of it across contexts.

  Example: To teach a student to use a homework checklist, allow the student to explain and show the process to you and /or another student. Ask her to do the same things with her parent(s) when she gets home.

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Strategies continued

- **Teach students to use a skill.**

  Transfer of learning happens when the student understands when to use the skill. Use many ex amples highlighting what about a situation requires the skill to be used. The learning should also include situations in which the skill should not be used.

  Example: To teach a student the skill of joke telling, practice telling jokes in appropriate situations (lunchtime, breaks, correct audience, etc…), but also practice in knowing when not to tell jokes at all (during reading time, tests, etc…) and why.

  Example: To teach a high school student to turn in their homework, turning in homework should be practiced in many classes. A volunteer, like the student's special education teacher or a peer, may be willing to walk through this with the student, practicing in every class. The student should under stand the expectations and why it is important to turn in their homework.

- **Practice skills to fluency or automaticity.**

  Students with cognitive challenges generally require many learning trials to reach fluency. Practice basic skills until they are automatic before moving on to more complex skills. Once the basic skills are automatic, the student will have more success using the skills correctly across all contexts. For example, students can be successful with higher math skills only once basic arithmetic is automat ic; reading comprehension will only improve after basic decoding no longer requires conscious effort.

  Example: To teach a student two step addition (31+11) they must first have fluency with single step addition (2+3). Having fluency with single step addition allows them to focus on the new skill of the second step.

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Inflexibility

Description of the problem

Students with TBI sometimes get "stuck" on an activity. They can have difficulty with new tasks or changes in the schedule, routines, activities or staff. A student may become overwhelmed or anxious when changes are made to familiar routines, activities or schedules, causing them to become inflexible. Students who experience this problem may have trouble making transitions during the school day (from lunch or gym back to classroom work), tolerating changes in schedules, adjusting to changes in staff, etc. In extreme cases, even seemingly simple transitions, such as from sitting to standing, can be difficult and cause stress.

Causes

Inflexibility is often associated with damage to the frontal lobes, the most common site of injury in TBI.

Solution

Help inflexible students make it through the day with minimal stress for everyone.

Strategies

- **Plan ahead**

  When a student knows what to expect, they have less anxiety. This reduces the chance of the student becoming inflexible. If you know you need to change a routine, first tell the student what the change will be so he will know what to expect. Next, allow time to practice so there will be some familiarity with the new routine. It can also be helpful to teach the student some specific self-talk to use during the transition. For example, "This change is challenging, but it will be OK."

  Example: "Today will be the last day you work on your homework assignment before leaving class. Starting tomorrow, you will write the assignment down right before leaving class, and you will start it at home. Today we will practice by writing down the assignment and instructions about where to start when you get home. Then we will put everything away and take a break. After a few minutes, I will have you role play what you will do when you get home. This will be good practice for doing it on your own."

- **Make associations**

  Sometimes it can be helpful for the student to associate herself with a hero who is famously flexible.

  Example: If your student likes soccer, you might point out a player who can play several positions or has often changed teams. Then you can encourage her to be like her model and be flexible.

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Strategies continued

- **Use concrete organizers to display schedules**

  Organizers can also help a student with accepting changes. Sometimes it helps to use picture schedules to outline the day's activities.

  Example: A picture schedule might include photos of the bus, the student's homeroom, different classes the student has, the lunch room, the library or any other places the student goes or activities he or she completes each day. The pictures can be arranged in the order the student will visit each place or complete each activity throughout the day. When the schedule changes, change the order of the familiar pictures and verbally go over what to expect to help changes feel less threatening to the student.

- **Assure the students that some routines will stay the same.**

  Often inflexible students use routines for comfort in a frightening world. When one routine needs to change, make sure that they understand that others will remain the same.

  Example: "The routine for when you begin your homework assignment has changed, but the routine for doing it and turning it in is still the same."

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Managing Behavior Challenges in the Midst of Crisis

Description of the problem

Many students with TBI have limited ability to control their own behaviors, are often confused and frustrated by the daily requirements of school and are simply angry about the changes that have resulted from their brain injury. Unable to understand their multiple emotions and unable to manage them, it is common for students with TBI to express depression and anxiety by acting out aggressively. It is critical to remember that many of the most severe behavioral challenges demonstrated by students with brain injury are NOT willful or purposeful.

Aggressive behavior, whether physical or verbal, can cause risks to the health and safety of the student and to others and it often results in removal from the classroom or in the worst cases, alternative placement in more restrictive settings.

Causes

The parts of the brain that manage impulse control, including control of aggression, are frequently damaged in TBI. In addition, many students with challenging behaviors demonstrated some difficulties with behavioral regulation and impulse control prior to brain injury, and these behavioral tendencies can be exacerbated by brain injury.

Solution

Create intervention strategies to address common situations that result in behavioral challenges before they emerge (e.g., learning to take a break, identifying situations that cause fatigue, engaging in positive physical activities routinely). Use communication strategies to defuse an outburst should one arise. Have a plan to address these situations before they happen.

Strategies

- **Remain calm and positive**

  A student's anxiety can spread to you or others and spiral out of control. If you remain calm and positive, you can interrupt the spread of anxiety and defuse the situation. It models how you want the student to behave and provides positive re-enforcement for good behavior. This is hard to do, especially when students demonstrate significant behavioral challenges. It is useful to routinely practice calm responses to emotionally charged situations with co-workers to create a series of common verbal responses to use when a problem emerges.

  Example: Try one or more of the following:
  - "OK, you're not ready. I'll wait."
  - "Looks like you need a break."
  - "No big deal."
  - "Let me know when you are ready."

- **Try redirection**

  Sometimes you can head off a crisis by redirecting a student to an entirely unrelated task. Make sure the new task is neutral to prevent inadvertent reinforcement of the aggression; you do not want a student to think, "When I threaten to hit someone, I get to go play."

  Example: If your student is getting frustrated in math, try asking them to take a note to the office. This will give them a break and allow you an opportunity to help them "catch up" when they return.

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Strategies continued

- **Keep everyone safe**

  It will sometimes be easier to move others out of the room into a safe space than it will be to move an out-of-control student into isolation. Follow your institutional and state guidelines for physical restraint in extreme cases.

- **Present yourself as a helper rather than an enforcer**

  Students have more trust in helpers than enforcers and are therefore, more likely to comply with the helper.

  Example: Ask, "What can I do to help you?" Or "What do you need to get back in control of yourself?" It might create an opening for verbal intervention; at the very least, it is unlikely to escalate the situation.

- **State the situation clearly and simply**

  Sometimes an objective, non-judgmental statement of what has occurred can help a student regain calm. Limit the amount of chaos by choosing a single spokesperson and keeping all communications clear, calm and confident.

  Example: Try saying, "OK, you were working on a math problem and something went wrong. When you're ready, we can figure it out and try something else."

- **Choose your battles wisely**

  If a student appears to challenge your authority, consider the consequences before reacting. Does it matter? Is this a big enough deal that you have to address it at this exact moment? Is there a way to reach your goal without provoking the student? Only start a battle if you're sure it's what's best for the student's success and you're sure you can win. Just remember, you will not win most battles.

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Memory Problems

Description of the problem

Following a brain injury, memory can be affected in many different ways, including inconsistent memory and deficits in long term and short term memory. Memory problems can present a variety of challenges in a classroom situation for students.

Causes

TBI can compromise memory systems by specific injuries to particular parts of the brain or by microscopic injuries throughout the brain. Sometimes deficits are lifelong and severe; other times they are relatively minor and improve over time.

Solution

Understand the different memory problems commonly seen in TBI and implement compensatory strategies. The strategies you use to help your student will vary depending on how the problem presents and the needs of the individual student.

Strategies

- **Understand the problem**

  Students who struggle with memory problems often have difficulty with learning, storing and retrieving information. Often, memory impairments affect new learning without damaging a student's ability to recall things learned before the injury. Students can also have inconsistent memory problems: They remember one day, but forget the next. This can be very frustrating for a teacher!

- **Plan appropriate accommodations**

  Accommodations need to be based on a student's ability to learn and recall new material. In memory, the rich get richer; the more you know about a subject, the easier it is to learn new things about the same subject. When teaching, relate new information to things students already know. Building associations can also help with retrieval by creating multiple paths to the information.

  Example: If you are teaching a lesson on chemical reactions, first draw on previous knowledge that relates to the subject. You might ask students if they have ever baked bread or mixed vinegar and baking soda. Pointing out these are chemical reactions creates associations with previously learned materials and experiences.

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Strategies continued

- **Use errorless learning**

  Students with compromised learning systems learn best when almost all learning trials are correct. Trial-and-error learning, where the student is allowed the opportunity to make choices and then given feedback if an error is made, can lead to incorrect learning among students with memory impairments as the error may be what sticks in the student's mind. Instead, set your student up for success by providing coaching or modeling a task while they are first learning a new concept, activity or behavior.

  Example: To give your student a spelling test, first provide a spelling list containing only two words. After the student looks at the words, ask her to cover them and write them out on her paper without looking. Next, uncover the words and compare. Gradually add more words following this same model: look, cover, copy, compare.

- **Use external reminders and organizers**

  Whether students can use datebooks, appointment calendars or memory books (paper or electronic) on their own or with adult help will depend on their abilities. Prospective memory (remembering things that will happen, like an appointment or assignment deadline) tends to fare worse in a brain injury than retrospective memory (remembering things that have already happened). Therefore, external aids to organize what a student needs to do can be vital to school success.

  Example: Help create a class assignment calendar for the student with a brain injury. Ask the student to check the calendar every day for daily tasks as well as look ahead for tasks that are coming up. Monitor the use of the calendar with the student as needed.

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Organization

Description of the problem

Often, a traumatic brain injury impacts a student's ability to effectively organize many aspects of their life. Students unable to organize their time, material or thoughts struggle to succeed in the classroom.

Causes

The frontal lobes of the brain store and process organizational strategies. Strategies mastered before injury may be lost and new strategies can become more difficult to learn. Children who are very young at the time of injury and who have mastered very few strategies often have the hardest time overcoming organizational difficulties, but students of any age can be greatly impacted by organizational deficits.

Solution

Provide a variety of organizational supports to students who need them.

Strategies

- **Experiment**

  Be prepared to experiment with different supports. All the supports listed here work for certain people; none of them will work for everyone. Try different supports or combinations of supports until you find one that seems to be helpful, adjusting over time as needed.

- **Routines and schedules**

  Time management is difficult and unstructured time can be unproductive because the student may lack the capacity to formulate a plan on his/her own. Utilizing and adhering to a consistent schedule and routine will help minimize the need for students to struggle with creating this themselves as well as alleviate some of the confusion and frustration this would cause.

  Example: During unstructured time, give the student 2 choices for how to spend their time. For example, you can say, "You can either read a book or work on your art project. Which would you like to do?" If the student is independently using a written schedule to follow along, you can write the two choices in that time slot.

- **Models**

  Students who struggle with organization often have a hard time picturing success. How will they know when they've done it correctly? Providing a model for what "finished" looks like can be very helpful.

  Example: Provide the student with a sheet of completed math problems, an essay of the proper length and format, or a sample art project before they begin their assignment. Tell them that their assignment will look similar when they are finished.

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Strategies continued

- **Ask for help**

  Teach students to ask for help. Together, decide in advance how they'll know they need help, how they'll ask for it, and what kinds of help will be available.

  Example: "If you get to a point where you don't know what to do next or you are confused, raise your hand. I'll give you a nod so that you know you can put your hand down, and I'll come and talk it through with you."

- **Advanced organizers**

  Advanced, graphic organizers function as maps to tasks, schedules or thought processes. They can be as simple as a written to-do list and as complicated as a building blueprint. Generally, you want an organizer to be as simple as the task allows and as graphic as the student requires. Very young children or older students with significant disability might require an entirely pictorial organizer. Older children or adolescents can often use written lists, although nearly everyone can benefit from pictures for certain kinds of tasks.

  Example: If you are with a student for one class period, you can organize your schedule for that period by time or by activity. If organizing by time, write the time or have a picture of a clock displaying the time with the activity next to it. Include the steps (if needed) to complete the activity. When it's time to change tasks, say "Look on your schedule and find 10:00. Complete that activity."

  If organizing by activity, write the activity-or use a picture of the activity-and include the steps (if needed) to complete the activity. When it's time to move on to the next task, say "Look on your schedule and find the picture of the calculator. Complete that activity."

- **Rehearsal**

  Allowing a student with organizational difficulty to practice a complex task before being asked to perform it can be helpful. If certain situations routinely cause anxiety or stress, practicing self-talk scripts can be useful. Nearly any recurring situation can be practiced, which helps students know both what to expect and what is expected of them.

  Example: To teach a student how to navigate a large building from one room to another or going from class to class in three minutes through noisy crowded hallways, talk it through or write it down and then practice. First do it with the student when the hallways are empty. Then let the student do it alone, still while empty. Finally, ask the student to do it alone while the halls are full. Talk about how it went.

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In The Classroom

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Positive Behavior Support

Description of the problem

Students with TBI often need a systematic approach to behavior management that differs significantly from the approaches commonly used in schools. They often have difficulty learning from the consequences of their actions; the skills they've learned in rehab frequently don't translate across contexts and approaches that focus on their disability tend to be counter-productive.

Causes

The parts of the brain that control impulsive behavior and permit learning from the consequences of previous behavior are frequently damaged in a TBI. Loss of ability in many areas paired with recovering from a significant injury can result in depression, sadness and frustration. These challenges can make behavior management difficult and stressful.

Solution

Be proactive in dealing with students who present challenging behaviors. Use established routines, positive communication, lesson planning and environment modifications to prevent or minimize challenging behaviors.

Strategies

- **Use positive, negotiated, well-understood routines**

  Even among healthy adults, not knowing what to expect in a situation can cause anxiety. As much as possible, make each day predictable. Use graphic organizers so students can see what is going to happen next. Manage transitions between activities so students aren't taken by surprise.

  Example: Something as simple as posting the daily schedule in a visible location can make a big difference. Post the schedule in a highly visible spot and then stick to it.

- **Promote positive interactions**

  Keep your interactions with students as calm and positive as possible.

  Example: If your student is upset, don't allow yourself to get upset as well. In a calm voice, give simple 1-step instructions.

- **Teach students how to notice and control their emotions**

  When you notice a student getting frustrated, you might say, "I noticed that your knuckles are white. Often that means you're getting frustrated. Yesterday, I noticed your knuckles were white just before you lost control and shouted. What could you do now, while you're still calm, to feel less frustrated and prevent an outburst?" Then talk about what options are open to the student such as asking you for help, taking a break by turning to another task and so on.

  Example: Learning to control our emotions is a key skill for all of us, but sometimes students with brain injury need to be taught more explicitly.

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Strategies continued

- **Use positive communication**

  Communicate positively and control the setting to create a momentum of success before introducing difficult or unpleasant tasks.

  Example: If reading is a nightmare for a particular student, but she loves science start with science. Lead her through tasks she knows she can do and enjoys doing before asking her to read.

- **Offer choices**

  Even young children like to feel they have meaningful choices to make and at least some control over their own lives. As much as possible, give students both choices and control within the constraints of the school setting.

  Example: If it's quiet reading time, offer your student a book of choice or to listen to a recorded book. Make sure you are happy with both choices so it doesn't matter what option the student selects.

- **Provide meaningful tasks**

  Tasks and instructions need to feel meaningful, important and interesting to the student doing them. Good lesson planning can prevent problem behaviors by engaging students in high interest activities that are constructionally appropriate.

- **Manage the environment**

  Prevent negative behaviors by changing the environment. Set up the space to create clear areas for certain activities.

  Example: Try moving two students who frequently bicker to opposite sides of the classroom.

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Sample List of Classroom Routines

Regular Classroom Routines	Student with a TBI
Ask the class to line up for recess	Before it is time to line up for recess, remind the class where the line forms and that each student should wait until their row is called.
During the first week of school ask students to sharpen their pencils at the beginning and end of class.	Before class, remind everyone to sharpen their pencil. Have extras ready for the student with TBI just in case.
At the start of the school year, tell students to put their lunchbox in the basket when they come into class.	Greet all students as they enter the room and remind them where to put their lunchbox and backpack.
At the start of the school year, tell students to put their homework in the homework box.	At the beginning of class, remind students where the homework box is and tell them to make sure they put today's homework there.
Periodically throughout the school year remind students to raise their hand to ask a question.	Daily, many times, remind all students to raise their hand when they have a question. Do not answer unless their hand is raised. Praise students for raising their hand with questions.

Additional Routines That May Be Needed for Students With Brain Injury

- Social routines may be needed to help the student practice appropriate social interactions.

  Example: The student says good morning to you as they enter the classroom.

- Problem solving routines may be needed to help the student navigate problems that arise throughout the school day.

  Example: For every problem follow these 4 steps to solve it:

  1. Determine what the exact problem is
  2. List your options to solve it
  3. Choose an option
  4. Put your choice into action

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Routines continued

- Routines to manage anger and frustration may be needed to help the student manage themselves.

  Example: When you feel yourself feeling frustrated or angry, touch your nose and I will know you need a break and will allow you one.

- An established routine for getting help can help minimize frustration.

  For example: Move to the help table and I will see you and will come help you.

- Routines for navigating the school can also be helpful.

  For example: If you need to go to the restroom, raise your hand.

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Sense of Self and Personal Identity

Description of the problem

Our sense of who we are is closely tied to what we can do. Sudden changes in ability and personality can cause the student with a brain injury to be unsure of who they are. When struggling with identity issues, a student can be moody, depressed or irritable, making daily classroom functioning a challenge. Often, academics and relationships are impacted.

Causes

A serious brain injury can dramatically and permanently alter what a student can do. A student who has always been "the smart one" might lag academically. A "jock" might find athletics permanently off-limits. Creating a new sense of self can take months or years and come at a high psychological cost.

Solution

Teachers, families and friends may need to be involved to help the student rebuild their sense of self. They can interact with students in ways that can help build a positive, realistic personal identity.

Strategies

- **Communicate positively and respectfully with the student**

  Empty praise is likely to be counter-productive. Instead, offer real, positive comments and constructive criticism as the student is able to hear and accept it. Be patient.

  Example: Instead of saying, "It's okay you failed the test, I know you will do better next time," try saying "I know you put a lot of effort into this and feel disappointed about your grade, so let's see if we can come up with some ideas to help you get a higher grade next time."

- **Work with parents to build positive associations**

  All people, with or without a disability, use a variety of associations in building their personal identity. Most people include heroes or other respected individuals in their sense of themselves. Help your student identify someone he admires and can associate his behavior with and remind the student of these associations throughout the day to encourage positive behavior.

  Example: If your student with anger identifies with Batman you can remind him that Batman's character calls for control and restraint, not outbursts.

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Strategies continued

- **Provide tasks**

  Find important and meaningful tasks and hold the student to a reasonably high standard while providing enough support to ensure the student can meet that standard at least most of the time. Positive self-identity comes from successful completion of challenging, meaningful tasks.

  Example: If your student has trouble with organization, but values completing all of her work, help her create a daily checklist to ensure each assignment is turned in. Practice using the checklist with her daily, then reduce to every other day. Finally, check in weekly and review with her how far she has come since first starting to use the checklist.

- **Help students cope with defeat**

  Everyone has to deal with failures and defeats, but students faced with new cognitive or physical limitations often face failures in what they were. A student who used to be on the track team may now struggle to keep her balance. A student who was always quick to learn new concepts in math class may now be falling behind as new material is introduced. Often, the area the student is now failing in used to be their greatest strength. Talk with the student about how problems occur and how they might be avoided in the future.

  Example: If your student doesn't complete a book report because he can't remember what the story was about after reading it, suggest that next time he take notes on the main points of each chapter and use this while writing the report. Or, watch the movie version and pause it to write down details while the memory of the story is still intact.

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Slowed Processing Speed

Description of the problem

After sustaining a brain injury, students may have slowed processing speed that can contribute to problems with learning. It can take longer to understand, think about and respond to questions.

Causes

Damage that commonly occurs to the brain during a TBI can significantly slow processing speed. Sometimes, when the brain is injured there is a breakdown in the ability to transmit information properly.

Solution

Help students compensate for slow information processing.

Strategies

- **Understand the problem**

  Slowed processing speed can contribute to problems in areas such as attention, memory, decision making, problem solving, analysis, initiation, organization and planning. It is important to understand how it is impacting your student and to work with parents, teachers and support staff to put in place accommodations that meet your student's individual needs. Participating in classroom discussions can be frustrating and confusing because by the time the student grasps a concept or formulates a response, the conversation has moved to another subject. While they were working hard to process the last information and form a response, they may have missed the beginning of the conversation about the new concept and have no idea what the current topic is.

  Example: A student with slowed processing speed may be able to follow along in a lecture, but stopping the lecture and asking that student a specific question may not be effective because the student would need to quickly access the information and formulate a response. Instead, call on a different student and ask the student with a brain injury at a later time.

- **Use the same routines**

  Learning a new routine takes more processing energy than following a familiar routine. As with all things, the more you practice a skill the better you get at it. Keep instructional routines stable and familiar so they can become as automatic as possible. Establishing routines that are used daily in the same situations helps all students to be successful.

  Example: A student will be more likely to remember to turn homework in if it is done at the same time (ex. beginning of class, just before leaving, etc…) in each class throughout the day.

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Strategies continued

- **Use organizational supports**

  The use of organizational supports will help to minimize processing requirements and allow the student to focus on the content or meaning of what is being taught rather than the structure in which it is being presented.

  Example: Provide written plans, outlines or agendas (using words or pictures as appropriate to the task and the student) to help students stay organized and oriented within a task.

- **Use nonverbal supports**

  Spoken language requires rapid processing, even if you speak slowly. Use outlines, pictures, symbols and gestures to reinforce what you say and keep it in the student's mind longer than your spoken words.

  Example: A daily schedule written on the whiteboard will serve as a nonverbal support that will help the student throughout the day.

- **Check understanding of directions**

  Students with slow processing speed often miss directions or do not understand them completely. Make sure the student understands instructions and new information before moving on to something new.

  Example: Ask the student to repeat the instruction or information back to you before moving on to something new or giving more directions.

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Social Perception

Description of the problem

Competent social perception includes knowing that other people have thoughts, beliefs, emotions and intentions. Being able to read other people based on their words, behavior and facial expressions and adjusting one's actions based on those readings can be challenging for students with TBI. Many students with TBI have trouble with one or more of the areas of social competence. Difficulty with even one area can negatively impact a student's overall social competence.

Causes

Social perception is tied to specific neurological circuits in the frontal lobes and limbic systems of the brain. The frontal lobes are particularly vulnerable in TBI. Therefore, deficits in social perception are a common effect of TBI.

Solution

Help students overcome social perception deficits.

Strategies

- **Understand the problem and help the student's peers do the same**

  An adolescent boy might misread a girl's sympathetic smile as a romantic invitation and proceed to respond in a sexually offensive manner. Or a child might misread a peer's teasing gesture as a threat and react aggressively. In both cases, faulty social perception can lead to a socially challenging situation. Peers with some understanding of social perception and how a lack of it can cause problems can help prevent some of the more devastating consequences of mistakes. Explain to the student's peers that it is a result of the brain injury and suggest strategies they can use when awkward situation arise.

  Example: If a student with TBI is having problems with another student, pull the other student aside and say, "Jenny's brain injury makes it hard for her to pick up on social cues, so sometimes she misinterprets situations and reacts inappropriately. When this happens, it might help if you try to talk to her and explain what is happening with words.

- **Talk about your own social perception with the student**

  Describe what you see followed by what you think it might mean. Bringing your own perceptions into language shows the student how much a part of everyday life it is and demonstrates the specific cues you use.

  Example: "I see you are smiling and quivering; I think you're excited and happy about something." "I notice that Tasha is clenching and unclenching her fingers; that's a sign of stress. She might be nervous about the math quiz later today."

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Strategies continued

- **Be clear about how easy it is to make mistakes in social perception**

  Even the most skilled adult can misread cues and situations. Teach students to double-check their perceptions with words, if necessary. This is especially important for students who also struggle with impulse control. It is easy for impulsive students to misread cues through haste and then react without waiting to notice all the evidence. Making a quick verbal double-check habitual can force them to slow down, hear the answer and then react.

  Example: "You look angry to me, are you?" "I think you're teasing, am I right?"

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In The Classroom

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Traumatic Brain Injury: What Teachers Should Know

What Is TBI

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. 1.7 million TBIs occur each year.

A TBI Can Result From

- Falls
- Car wrecks
- Sports injuries
- Collisions with objects or other people
- Being shaken
- Any trauma to the head

Common Symptoms of TBI

Cognitive/Communication	Emotional/Behavioral	Physical
Feeling dazed or in a fog	Irritability	Dizziness
Disorientation	Quick to anger	Weakness
Confusion	Decreased motivation	Changes in balance
Difficulty concentrating	Anxiety	Headaches
Slowed information processing	Depression	Changes in vision
Difficulty learning new information	Social withdrawal	Changes in hearing
Difficulty with memory	Does not get the "gist" of social interactions	Sleep disturbance
Difficulty juggling multiple tasks	May comment on or react to things that seems random to others	Fatigue
Communicating in "socially unacceptable" ways		
Difficulty with concentration and attention		

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Identification of Students with TBI

- Many students with brain injury are not appropriately identified for accommodations.
- Challenges that result from a TBI are also common in students with other disabilities.
- TBI is an eligibility category under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Some students with TBI may need a 504 plan or special education services in order to succeed in school.

Key Questions to Ask When Identifying Students with TBI

Did the student:

- Have a history of performing at a higher level?
- Have difficulties that began after an event likely to cause a TBI?
- Lose previously learned skills?
- Become unaware of loss of skills and abilities?
- Exhibit personality changes?
- Lose social skills or abilities?

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