

**Methods for supporting more independence  
with people who can only do one thing at a time**

by  
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*Example:*

This young man who is helping you move boxes will do well if you ask him to, "Take this to the third floor and come right back for another load." If you don't give him such a concrete direction, he would go to the third floor and then wander off to do whatever crossed his mind at the time.

*Analysis:*

In the moments between structured activities people who can only do one thing at a time often become distracted and drift off into whatever catches their momentary attention.

It can be helpful to have a standard transition activity that will bring them constantly back into focus. You don't want to chase after them to try to get them to stop doing whatever has caught their attention. You want them to come to you for structure and guidance about what is next.

*Approaches:*

Explain to the person, "Your brain works perfectly well with one idea at a time." "You remember what to do when something is there to remind you."

For many individuals, they can read with comprehension at a higher level than they can understand or remember from verbal discussion. After counseling and reaching an understanding with these individuals, I always give them a letter to explain themselves to others.

Typically this will include comments such as the following:

- When speaking with me, talk slowly
- Talk about just one thing at a time
- Repeat what you say so that I have time to think about it
- Write down the important things I have to know
- Please show me exactly what you want me to do
- Let me finish one thing before you give me another

*Use physical props to assist the person to “move along” with their day.*

*Use a standard transition activity:*

One transition activity that works for many is a deck of cards. There are many physical card games such as “Snap” and “Speed” that are fun and don’t take more than a moment to do. The transition activity when the person is done one structured activity could be, “Get the cards for a game of Speed.”

*Caution:*

Lists can be difficult because the person may become overwhelmed by looking at all the things on the list. Typically they skip all the beginning and middle steps and jump to do the last one so that they can be all done with the list.

It can be helpful to put pictures or words for each step of any action sequence onto small, laminated cards. Hole-punch each of these and put them onto a large ring. This way, only one picture or printed prompt is visible at a time.

Following your transition activity the support person can then indicate the next ring on the picture ring that shows the steps of the next structured activity.

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