

Unstuck and On Target

FAQ

All about *Unstuck!*

How do I manage when students try to take over or disrupt the lessons?

- **Prevent negativity by maintaining a positive climate in the group lessons.** Your actions and mood have an impact on your students' actions and mood and you staying positive will help your students stay positive as well.
- **Maintain a 5:1 ratio of praise to correction.** Research shows that praising children or making positive statements at least five times more often than giving commands or reprimands can reduce behavioral challenges and improve social skills.
- **Use humor to keep the tone of the lessons lighthearted and fun.** Humor can be a powerful tool to keep the lessons positive and fun while also helping children who may be getting stuck.
- **Sometimes you can co-opt a negative student by agreeing with them.** You can agree with a complaint they have while suggesting to do something else.
- **Use visuals.** Make sure that points for positive behavior are awarded in a visual, systematic way, such as on a chart or with a tangible reward, and counted frequently throughout the day.

How do I keep my students engaged?

- **Use examples that are relevant to your students to make the lesson content more meaningful.** If you can think of scenarios or examples from your students' lives or interests, then weaving those into the lessons can help keep them engaged and interested.
- **Highlight the "why."** Throughout *Unstuck* we are explicitly teaching skills that do not necessarily come naturally to students with executive dysfunction. It will help to explicitly state "why" the skills you are teaching are helpful to them.
- **Build positive momentum by pacing the lesson well, emphasizing the activities your students enjoy most, and praising their effort.** Keep the lessons moving and be mindful not to lecture. Also, feel free to alter the presentation of the activities to cater to your students' preferences.

How do I avoid power struggles?

- **Model flexibility for the student.** When a student is getting upset, it is important for you to use your own coping strategies and keep a "clear mind" in order to help them. Students will need a clear and calm cue from you in order to use a coping strategy and your modeling of that behavior will help them do it too.
- **Use the scripts and coping strategies to back out of a power struggle.** Bring in scripts as needed, discussing key concepts like "flexibility" or creating a "Plan A and a Plan B." If you have covered compromise and negotiation, then use some of those strategies to solve power struggles.
- **Don't overload the student with expectations they can't meet.** Be cognizant of demands that might cause the students to become overloaded and shutdown. Your expectations for what the students can do should match their capabilities and skill sets. From there you can gradually increase your expectations and demands as students get more competent with their skill sets.
- **Let the students make as many choices as possible.** Don't turn over control in all situations, but provide some choices for students within the structure of your agenda for your lesson. For example, you could let the students choose whether they would like to work with handouts or write on the board.
- **Provide a buffer from or reduce stimulation if the students seem overwhelmed.** Some students are sensitive to noise and shouldn't sit near a noisy doorway or a particularly active and intrusive classmate. Do what you need to do to set your students up for success.
- **When a student's behavior is escalating, talk less and use visuals to communicate.** Some students respond almost magically well when a response is written instead of spoken. Keep a whiteboard handy to write things down. You can also create flowcharts with students who may be getting stuck on something by replaying a scenario with a flowchart and then rewriting it the way the student wished the scenario had happened. Flowcharts are a visual way to show the logical progression of situations and scenarios.

How can I get my students to use the *Unstuck* scripts outside of the lessons?

- **Practice, practice, practice.** Research tells us that in order for a skill to become automatic or routine, we need repeated exposure or practice opportunities. As with any skill your students learn, the more opportunities they have to practice and try the skill in multiple settings, the more likely they are to be able to use the skills and strategies independently and effectively.
- **Post visual reminders of the scripts in as many places as possible.** Having a list of the scripts visually posted in the classroom is a great way to remind students, teachers, and others to use them.

How can I get my students to use the *Unstuck* scripts outside of the lessons?—continued

- **Make sure all adults who work with the students know the scripts.** The more people who work with your students that know about these scripts and use them or prompt your students to use them, the better your students will be able to generalize these skills.
- **Casting a wide net of support can be as easy as drafting a quick email or document defining the scripts and giving brief examples of how and when to use them.** Better yet, establish an email chain with everyone who interacts with your students. As you introduce a new script, send off a quick email with a description of the script and a brief suggestion for how to use it.
- **Let students know when you are sharing this information with people in their world.** Knowing that others will be supporting them in using these strategies and scripts will offer comfort as they can anticipate a predictable and routine approach to working on those skills that are most difficult for them.

Some of the words/scripts seem to really annoy one of my students. How important is it for me to stick to the scripts?

- **Don't give up too quickly.** The scripts and key phrases are an integral component of this intervention. Remember that this is a new skill for your student, and change is not their specialty. Keep trying to use those words.
- **If you decide that the student is truly stuck then consider whether collaborating with them to pick another script might help.** Students may react negatively to a word or phrase if they have learned to associate it with a negative experience or outcome. If this is the case, then choose another word or phrase in its place that has a similar meaning. Be sure that this new word or phrase is used frequently and consistently and that you share it with others so they use it, too.

How do I get through the whole lesson when it seems we always run out of time?

- **Be proactive in heading off "off-target" conversation by using scripts.** You can ask the group if it is getting off-target because it is "stuck" on a detail or a "little deal."
- **Delay off-track discussions that are nonetheless important to a group member to the end of the lesson.** You can write the topic raised by the student on the board and say that you will come back to it at the end of the lesson. If it is something the whole group likes to talk about, you can even use it as a reward for finishing the lesson with some spare time.
- **Post times next to each step of the GWPDC for the day.** Give the students a certain (reasonable) amount of time to do an activity and time them to see if they can get it done on time.

How do I get through the whole lesson when it seems we always run out of time?—*continued*

- **Use your judgement if one part of a lesson is taking longer than expected, but you think it is valuable.** You can decide to cut another activity out if the students are really getting a lot out of something and you don't want to cut it short. You may need to look ahead to decide what to skip.

My students are finding some of the concepts too hard. How do I help them understand?

- **Modify lessons to make them accessible to your students.** Each lesson comes with a Summary and a Goal, which underscore the key components of the intervention. You can use these to modify lessons to meet your students' needs while still meeting that lesson's goal. You can also take some time to be sure your students understand the foundational concepts that will help them understand lesson content that may be more difficult.
- **Use more visuals.** Some students, particularly those who have difficulty with language comprehension, benefit greatly from the use of added visuals to illustrate ambiguous concepts. Having a whiteboard to draw on, watching movies, or acting can help illustrate concepts for students.
- **Do more roleplays.** When teaching new concepts, roleplaying can really get students engaged in learning. Roleplays can help students translate learned concepts into skills they use on a daily basis, especially students with executive function challenges who experience difficulty in this area.
- **Use relevant examples.** Consider using a student's interests to illustrate concepts. For example, if a student has a particular interest in video games, you might incorporate that interest in developing "Plan B" scenarios (e.g., "You invite a friend over, but they don't want to play the same video game that you do. How can you be flexible and come up with a 'Plan B'?").

My students are finding the language or concepts too easy or over-simplified. How do I increase the challenge?

- **Engage the students who find the material easy in mentoring those who do not.** It can be an effective strategy to have those students who are grasping the concepts quickly teach those who are not. Often different students will find different concepts easy or hard.
- **If the group as a whole is mastering the concepts quickly, you can shorten activities and fill up the time with a focus on generalizing the skills to other settings and increasing independent application of the skills.** Have the students come up with times when they will use what they just learned outside the group, or do activities that are less structured and require more problem-solving.

What do I do if my students don't like an activity?

- **Assess whether it's too hard and they actually don't understand it.** If this is the case then see the "My students are finding some concepts too hard" entry above for suggestions.
- **Use your own judgement.** Just like with the scripts, it may be that your students are averse to a specific activity. You're the teacher. You know them best; feel free to change the activity while keeping the goal of the activity in mind.
- **Assess whether the problem is a specific activity or a generally negative mindset in the group.** If your students are objecting to lots of the activities in the curriculum, then see "How do I keep my students engaged?" and "How do I manage when students try to take over to disrupt the lessons?" above.

Can I mess up *Unstuck*? Do I need to do everything perfectly as written?

- **No, you cannot mess up *Unstuck*!** Just like this intervention was developed to teach flexibility (among many, many other concepts and skills), the intervention itself is flexible. You know your classroom, students, and teaching style best. If you think starting with the "Feelings Target" is the best starting point for your group, then go for it!
- **If you need to adapt the activities or the content, that's fine too!** As we've mentioned above, there is no issue with making some changes and adaptations to the intervention. If the format of a specific activity won't work for your class, feel free to keep the intent of the original activity while coming up with something that may work better for your students. We have seen some amazing ways that school staff have adapted the lessons to best fit their students and teaching styles!

It feels like my group has gotten stuck on a lesson/skill/concept. Do I need to teach to mastery?

- **You do not need to teach to mastery!** If your students are having a hard time understanding a concept, sometimes it's best to take a break. There is no issue with moving on to another lesson instead of getting stuck on something, and many of the skills appear again and again across lessons. You can always revisit the lesson at another time when your students may be better equipped to understand the lesson they previously had trouble with!
- **At the same time, if you need to spend a little extra time on a lesson, there's no problem with that either!** Sometimes your students just need a little extra time to fully understand and learn the concepts and skills introduced in a lesson. Feel free to split up a particularly difficult lesson into two sessions to make sure that your students have enough time to learn the concepts introduced in a given lesson. Again, you know your students and their needs best!