

## **Cognitive Self-Management Strategies for Work**

*Cognitive Self-Management Strategies* are:

1. Behaviors, habits, and routines for improving cognitive performance at work and other everyday situations
2. Tools that people use in their regular lives to help them:
  - Pay attention
  - Remember important information
  - Plan ahead
  - Solve problems
3. Practical skills aimed at reducing problems caused by limited cognitive abilities
4. Used by everyone, not just people with cognitive challenges

*Cognitive Self-Management Strategies* are important for work because:

1. Cognitive challenges can interfere with the ability to participate in and benefit from vocational services
2. They help people get the most out of supported employment services
3. Optimize work performance
4. Help people “work around” cognitive challenges
5. They can improve cognitive functioning
6. They can optimize work performance for everyone, including people who do not experience cognitive challenges

### **1. Coping with Attention and Concentration Difficulties**

- Inattentive or off task behaviors, distracted, making errors, not noting errors
- Strategies to improve ability to attend to important information:
  - Identify and remove distractions, repeat back instructions to ensure accuracy, self-verbalize to focus on task, reduce clutter, organize work space

### **2. Coping with Memory Difficulties**

- Difficulty holding information “in mind”, skipping steps of tasks, missing appointments
- Strategies to increase ability to remember or access important information:
  - Memory aids (e.g., paper & pen, cell phone for recording information), scheduler, memory spots (e.g., place to put keys when not using them (such as a hook by the front door), “to do” or checklists, repeat back new name or instructions as soon as you hear it

### **3. Developing Routines at Home**

- Taking too long or skipping steps of morning routine, oversleeping
- Strategies to develop personal habits for improving the organization of one’s life at home:
  - Establishing set ways of accomplishing daily tasks, such as getting up & going to sleep at the same times, preparing for the next day the previous night, incorporating medications into daily habits, planning shopping for a specific day of the week

#### **4. Developing Routines for Your Job Search**

- Late/missing job interviews or appointments with employment specialist, unprepared for meetings with employment specialist, not systematically looking for jobs or following up on job leads
- Strategies to improve organization and active involvement in the job search and with employment specialist:
  - Checklists, going to and returning from work at the same times, doing tasks in a set order at specific times, putting work-related items in a particular place, having a standard way of checking the quality of work

#### **5. Planning Ahead**

- Appointment conflicts, tardiness, unprepared
- Strategies to help the client accomplish important tasks efficiently and thoroughly by thinking about them ahead of time:
  - Daily “to do lists”, use of scheduler to organize tasks and priorities

#### **6. Solving Problems**

- New or unexpected problems are ignored or not effectively resolved
- Strategies to prevent problems from occurring and to resolve them as soon as possible:
  - Teach signs of a problem at work, identify an accessible “problem solver”; plan and practice solutions for anticipated problems

#### **7. Improving Thinking Speed**

- Difficulty tracking events in real time, holding others’ up, slow to respond to questions or make decisions
- Strategies to improve the speed at which the person is able to complete work tasks:
  - Organization, reduction distractions, repeated practice (“over-learning) the task, find “short cuts” when possible

#### **8. Recognizing Your Strengths:**

Not knowing, or difficulties recognizing one’s unique qualities, skills, and resources

- Strategies to increase self-efficacy and hope for achieving work goals:
  - Make separate lists of personal qualities, skills, talents, and resources; get input from friends, family, employment specialist; helps “sell” oneself in job interviews

#### **9. Challenging Negative Thinking**

- Negative and inaccurate thinking can lead to negative feelings, low self esteem, pessimism, and interfere with people giving their best effort to find and keep a job
- Strategies to help recognize, challenge, and change negative or self-defeating thinking
  - Learn about the relationship of thinking and feelings and common styles of inaccurate thinking, know your personal strengths, keep a log negative thoughts and a replacement thought that is more helpful and realistic

#### Points for discussion:

Do you teach SM to your clients?

What CSM do you use?

How do you decide who needs a CSM?

Information on cognitive self management strategies from: SR McGurk & KT Mueser “Thinking Skills for Work: Cognitive Enhancement for Successful Employment” Guilford Press, *in press*. A section of the book has curricula about cognitive self-management and how to teach them, and includes educational handouts for clients, and other topics relating to optimizing cognition for the work place.