

Let's Talk About...

Spina bifida and learning problems at home

Spina bifida may cause your child to have learning problems at home and at school. You can help your child by changing play and learning at home. Below are some suggestions for teaching your child.

How can I help my child develop visuospatial and visual motor skills?

- Have your child try building with LEGO® bricks or blocks, doing puzzles, coloring, painting, cutting, or pasting. Molding clay, matching shapes, playing with visual matching games, and working on mazes, word searches, and hidden pictures can also help.
- Help preschoolers learn basic ideas about where objects are in relation to something else, such as up/down, in/out, top/bottom, and right/left. Teach these ideas, at first, with objects like blocks and toys.
- Teach your child about their body in space by rolling, turning, and somersaulting.



How can I improve my child's reading and understanding?

- Spend time reading to your child each day, and have your child read to you. Talk about the story and ask questions. Help them learn to pay attention to details by pointing out topic sentences, keywords, and interesting facts.
- Have an older child read questions about a story or chapter before reading it.
- Have your child act out the story.

How can I help my child pay attention?

- Ask your child to look at you before giving them instructions. Then have them repeat them back to you.
- Use short sentences when explaining things or giving your child directions.
- Break tasks into small parts and give your child one part at a time. Slowly increase the number of parts you give them.
- Set goals and reward your child when they finish a task or pay attention for a set time (like focusing for 5 minutes). Don't change the goal until your child has met the goal several times in a row. Then increase the goal as your child can do more (focusing for 7 minutes, then 10 minutes).
- Have your child do their homework in a quiet place without distractions.
- Take your child to their primary healthcare provider if they continue having trouble paying attention at school. A child psychiatrist or psychologist may also help.

How can I improve my child's memory skills?

- Find out how your child best remembers (a psychologist may help with this). Then help your child use their strongest memory skill. If your child has good visual memory, for example, have them keep a picture in their mind when they listen to a story.

- Play memory games.
- Teach your child to use notes, pictures, alarms, and calendars to help remember things. You may need to set timers as well to help your child remember at first.

How can I help my child with organizing skills?

- Have your child help you organize their things in a system you both understand. Help them use this system at first until it becomes a habit.
- Help your child set daily and weekly routines for tasks, like putting their backpack away in the same place every day.
- Encourage your child to think about what they need and gathering them before beginning an activity. Set up checklists they can use for repeat activities, like a school or sports checklist.

How can I help my child develop problem-solving and reasoning skills?

- Encourage your child to solve problems on their own using these steps:
 - Identifying the problem
 - Listing all possible solutions
 - Listing possible results for each possible solution
 - Choosing the best way to solve the problem
- When reading stories, have your child think about cause-effect relationships. For example, if your child sees smoke, help them realize that there must be a fire somewhere.



How can I help my child develop good social skills?

- Give your child specific and simple feedback in social situations. You might say: “It’s great that you like Mandy and want to be close to her, but sometimes other kids don’t like you to hang on them. Did you see how Mandy pulled away when you grabbed her arm?” Keep feedback short so it doesn’t feel like criticism and your child can clearly understand.
- Consider signing your child up for a social skills training group. This may be available at a local mental health center or outpatient children’s counseling center.

Notes

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