

# GROUP FACILITATION TIPS FOR SCHOOL THERAPISTS

These tips and strategies for group facilitation will come in handy for any pediatric therapist who is working with groups of kids during treatment sessions.

**1 || Establish a Home Base** Give kids a consistent “home base” – a seating space that they can return to in between each activity or anytime you have a moment or two of setup time during your group. We use a bench, balance beam, or floor spots.

**2 || Provide clear boundaries for body space** Floor spots come in handy to give a visual indication of each child's space when we're working on the floor and we also use hula hoops for this same purpose. You can also use painter's tape to make squares or other shapes on the floor for kids to sit inside.

**3 || Try a timer!** Use different types of visual timers to show kids how much time is left in each activity and as a consistent way of indicating when each activity is over during the treatment session or play group. Use a visual timer, or a simple kitchen timer, a bubble timer, or a children's countdown app timer.

**4 || Use a picture schedule and other visual prompts** Many kids benefit from visual prompts like a simple picture schedule with photos or icons of each activity. Even a simple “First, Then” page often does the trick, with a picture of the activity you're going to do now, and a picture of the activity that's coming next.

**5 || Put-in tasks for wait times** Use fine motor “put-in” tasks for the kids who are waiting their turns. These are simple activities like pushing buttons or popsicle sticks through a slit in a plastic container – just enough to keep kids' interest until it's their turn again.

**6 || Fidget objects for wait times** Another effective strategy for helping kids wait for their turn is having them hold a fidget tool while they wait. For example, if you're playing a game with bean bags, allow the kids to take a bean bag to their seats with them while they wait their turn. This keeps them engaged in the activity but also gives them something to hold on to and play with.

**7 || Try a consistent format** For some kids, it can help to stick to the same (or a similar) format for each group. For example, maybe you start each of your treatment groups with a song, then you read a movement story, and then you move to the table to do a craft. Try reviewing your group rules at the beginning of each group too! A consistent structure can help kids who need a more specific structure and who benefit from familiar routines.

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**8 || Use social stories** Social stories can be a great way for classroom staff and parents to help prepare kids who have a hard time participating (refusal, avoidance, temper tantrums, etc.) for an upcoming therapy group

**9 || Get their attention!** Try working with your group ahead of time to establish a consistent way to get everyone's attention during the group. Yell out a word that indicates that everyone should FREEZE! Or try giving the group different instructions while you're setting up for the next activity to keep little hands and bodies busy (e.g. Everyone tap your head! Everyone tap the table! Everyone rub your hands together!).

**10 || Try different seating options** Different seating options for kids who can't sit still are perfect for kids who are waiting their turn or for use during books and other seated activities.

**11 || Plan ahead but be flexible!** Having all of your materials prepared and set up ahead of time and having a general outline of how the group will go are the keys to a successful therapy group. BUT, never underestimate the power of flexibility! Some of the best and most effective group therapy sessions can happen when you're willing to let go of your plan and let the kids take the lead!