

# The Helper

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## *Working Memory*

### About The Helper:

The helper holds thoughts and ideas in your head. They're like a clipboard that keeps all your notes safe while you are using them. They remember details so you don't forget what you are doing. They help you follow steps, like when you're baking a cake or building Lego. They keep numbers in your head so you can do maths without writing it down. They let you picture things in your mind, like a story or a football game. They also hold the question in your head while you think of the answer. Your helper doesn't *solve* problems themselves – they just keep the important stuff ready so the other characters have what they need.

### When your Helper loses things

If your Helper needs some help, you might:

- Forget what you're doing. Like walking into a room and thinking "why did I come in here?"
- Lose your place when reading or writing. You might write one sentence, then forget what you wanted to write next, or forget what is happening in the story
- Start something, then get stuck. You begin a job but can't remember the next step
- Start talking, but then forget what you were going to say
- Find it hard to keep up with chat. You understand what someone says, but forget the bit they just told you
- Struggle with "in-your-head" problems. Like doing sums without paper, or thinking how to explain something
- Have trouble doing two things at once. Like copying the board while listening to the teacher
- Forget the question while you're trying to think of the answer
- Feel your brain is "full", or suddenly blank. Like someone wiped a whiteboard in your head

### What you can do to help your Helper

- Write it down. If it's on paper or typed, your Helper doesn't have to remember it
- Say it again. Repeat important things to yourself, out loud or in your head. This helps your Helper hold onto them
- One thing at a time. Too many things at once can muddle your Helper. Finish one job before starting the next
- Ask for instructions or steps to be written down. Or ask for them one at a time so you can write them yourself.
- Use helpers. Checklists, timers, and reminders can remember things for you. A phone can be really good at this.

Make sure the person is ready to learn these strategies. Remember, not every strategy works for everyone. When unsure, focus on what **you** can do to support the person

## What other people can do to help your Helper

### *Written information reduces the Helper's load*

- Written information lasts forever. What you say only lasts as long as their Helper can remember it.
- Keep it short and direct. Bullet point key points, or list steps of a task. Don't include extra bits they don't need.
- Ask them to write things down (in a work book, a notepad, their phone, etc). This helps them get in the habit of writing things down, so they can start to take charge of one of their key support strategies.

### *Practical strategies*

- Make sure people know **how** they ask for help. Remember – this might not be with words
- Break longer tasks into chunks with clear stopping points.
- Use routines, and format things the same way. This helps to reduce how much has to be held in mind
- Support them to use memory tools like post-its, timers, or “to-do” tick boxes. Technology (like reminders, calendars, checklists on phones) can be very helpful if used correctly.
- Keep verbal instructions short and clear. Give one step at a time if needed
- Give time to process. Pauses between steps helps information stick
- Ask them to repeat back instructions to check they got it.

### *Support and encourage*

- Check in during tasks. They might forget part of the instructions but feel embarrassed to say so.
- Be patient. They may know what to do but lose track part way through (despite them trying hard to focus!).
- Praise strategies (such as asking for a reminder, writing things down, etc) not results.

### *Attention*

- Working Memory (The Helper) needs Attention (the Spy) to hold information in mind. If they get distracted, the information will be forgotten within seconds. See the information sheet on Spy for more advice on Attention.

### *Long-term memory*

- To get to Long Term Memory (the Librarian), information has to go through Working Memory (the Helper). If someone has difficulty with Working Memory, they might not remember as much, or learn as quickly.
- Break learning down into small chunks, and check each bit is learned before moving on. If the chunks are too big, they won't 'fit' through Working Memory into Long-Term Memory.

Make sure the person is ready to learn these strategies. Remember, not every strategy works for everyone. When unsure, focus on what **you** can do to support the person