

## Differentiating Activities

It is important to plan activities which are appropriate and achievable for all children. In order to do this well for children with special educational needs, it is necessary to set targets and break them down into small achievable steps. With support, the child can build up expertise at each step and put everything learnt together to perform that task independently. This allows children to develop their skills and to feel a sense of achievement at each step of the process.

### Breaking down a target

You will need to look at the target and see how you can break it down into smaller achievable steps. Achieving each step may take a long time for some children and the support given will gradually reduce over time. Before you begin, you need to establish what skills are needed for each step and what stage the child is at developmentally in that skill to be able to set the task at their level. You would also need to consider what and how much support you would provide and how you may need to adapt the activity to help them to succeed.

If the long term the target for the child was to “**string 3 small beads onto a thin threading lace with a plastic end**”, you would among other things, need to check if the child has the ability to:

- Reach out towards an object - for example; a small ball.
- Hold an object in each hand at the same time.
- Grasp an object, one or two hands.
- Keep hold of it whilst moving it.
- Hold the object over the opening where is to be placed.
- Intentionally release the object.

### We can support the child to work towards succeeding at this target by:

- Demonstrating each step of the task.
- Giving hand on hand guidance to help them to grasp, guide and release objects into containers.
- Gradually reducing the object size down to a small threading bead.
- Holding the bead or threading post steady or closer to them.
- Giving a touch to their wrist, arm or elbow to prompt them to move the hand holding the bead.
- Pointing your finger to show where to place the bead.
- Giving a verbal cue to prompt them to do the action.

During each step remember to say what it is you want the child to do, for example; ‘post ball’ and as you reduce your physical prompt, continue to maintain your verbal prompt.

## **Backward chaining**

This means developing the child's skills starting from the end rather than the beginning of the process – so that the child always feels a sense of achievement, rather than failing mid-task.

For example, in a three bead threading activity, rather than expecting the child to try and place all three beads in succession and finding they could only manage one bead each time, you would place two of the beads onto the stem/lace first, leaving the last bead for the child to place themselves.

### **Target 'string three small beads onto a thin threading lace with a plastic end'**

It may be more appropriate to teach the skills below as individual targets, depending on the level of the child's skills and understanding.

- One large ring onto a rigid stem, stem - quite a lot narrower than the opening of the ring.
- One small size ball into an open container – gradually reducing size of ball and container.
- One large bead onto a rigid rod fixed onto a static stand - building up to 3 beads.
- One large bead onto a rigid hand held rod – building up to three beads.
- One large bead onto a rigid hand held rod with string – building up to three beads.
- One smaller size bead onto a thinner, slightly flexible thread, such as plastic coated washing line - building up to three beads.
- One small bead onto a thin lace with a metal end - building up to three beads
- One small bead onto a thin lace with a plastic end.
- Three small beads onto a thin threading lace with a plastic end, target.

### **Some general considerations before you start an activity**

#### **You may need to:**

- Use physical as well as verbal prompts.
- Consider where you are playing - too much sensory input - visual, auditory...) can be distracting for some children
- Work on listening and attention activities to develop the child's skill in this area
- Encourage the child to do "good listening", **Looking, Waiting, Listening**
- Teach names or signs for the objects, pictures or words used in your activity
- Consider who is part of the group, is it yourself and the child or a larger group

You will also need to consider the best position for the child to be in for the activity - whether it is seating them on a chair, at a table or seating them on the floor. Provide correct seating support such as placing a block under their feet, if their feet don't reach the ground when seated at a table, or place cushions around them to help them to maintain their balance if seated on the floor. If a child is thinking about their balance as well as trying to focus on the task they will find it hard to succeed at either.

Remember to give the child as little or as much support as is necessary for them to be successful. We can help a child to succeed at a task by considering how much support we give them. This enables the child to achieve in a more structured way. In effect, we are planning for success. If you find you are doing most of the task, consider whether what you are trying to achieve is developmentally appropriate for the child.

**Remember to:**

- Assess the child's stage of development based on the target you are going to set.
- Adapt the activity to help them to succeed.
- Break a target down into smaller steps and practice each step until it becomes effortless.
- Consider the support given by the adult.