

Equipping Aging Minds That Have Special Needs

Mediated Learning Experiences maintain cognitive skills



by Dr. Tom Miller,
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When we talk about a person with special needs, we often think of children in school. But some of us who are aging may find ourselves or those close to us having special needs.

Living Well 50+ means maintaining those cognitive skills and talents that have been part of our lives for several decades. But recently, friends and loved ones may have observed some slippage. It may show itself in being forgetful at times, regardless of our age. If a loved shows some of the early warning signs of dementia – such as memory lapses, poor judgment, difficulty thinking some things through, limited or faulty communication skills and/or periods of disorientation to time and place – short-term memory may need special attention.

The presence of mild cognitive impairment (MCI) in a loved one explains memory loss that is more pronounced than typical age-related forgetfulness. MCI will cause an inability to recall short-term memories such as recent events, while long-term memory

seems still intact. Some research estimates 4 percent of Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 years have some form of dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease.

There are options for those showing some signs of mental deterioration, including the use of Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE). Israeli psychologist Dr. Reuven Feuerstein is credited with introducing structural cognitive modifiability (SCM), which uses MLEs to trigger and enhance our brains as we age. Feuerstein argued that a person’s capability to learn is not solely determined by genetic make-up but is assisted by cognitive enhancement achieved through MLEs. Feuerstein assigns the major role to a human mediator who uses the right tools for training the brain.

Just as physical exercise is important for muscle tone and strengthening in aging, so mental exercise may be beneficial for individuals showing early signs of dementia. Cognitive skills exercises with a trained professional may improve one’s working memory, spatial awareness and the ability to visualize location and direction. These skills are crucial for performing complex tasks, such as

understanding and remembering directions. Visual and auditory learning have become very important in aging, so the ability to hold and recall visual and auditory information is an important skill to enhance. Reading comprehension exercises aid in building this skill. Techniques designed specifically to strengthen visual and auditory ability can provide some an improved quality of life.

Visual memory skills training can maintain and boost a person’s ability to recognize faces, distinguish colors and hold mental “pictures” of information. Logic and reasoning exercises are designed to enhance the ability to recognize patterns and observe and assess information more efficiently. Carol Brown, M.Ed., a specialist in this brain-training model at all ages, said, “We are able to train educators, therapists and other specialists in our multi-disciplinary approach, which increases one’s capacity to learn. Structural Cognitive Modifiability provides a proven set of exercises through a hands-on approach.”

Brown added the brain and IQ are not stagnant but can be strengthened with the right tools and instructional methods. The spectrum of skill-training segments associated with SCM brain training may benefit a variety of individuals across the life span. Several programs are designed to help any individual wanting to strengthen his or her ability to learn, including those who may have a diagnosis of adult or child Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity (ADHD), developmental delays, Asperger’s, learning disability (LD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Down syndrome or Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). For more information, visit www.equippingminds.com.



The ability to hold and recall visual and auditory information is an important skill to enhance.

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