

## Behavioural

The 'Behavioural' component of WS comprises the following areas:

- Distractibility
- Over-activity
- Poor adaptability
- Defiance/oppositionality

### Distractibility

Profile: Distractibility is probably the most significant of all behavioural issues in WS due to its prevalence and its impact on academic inclusion, curriculum participation, and engagement in learning. Teachers describe distractibility in learners with WS as comparable to other learners with special needs to being very severe ... to the point where the learner interferes with the learning of other pupils. Teachers also report that distractibility masks the learner's ability so it can be difficult to know what the learner actually knows. Distractibility tends to improve over time and is usually less noticeable in a one-to-one teaching situation.

Distractibility in learners with WS can also lead to flight risk in the child ... they see something that interests them and they go to it or follow it. This is particularly true of learners who see a car/tractor that interests them and they could run out on to the road to see it. This is a very real risk and all precautions should be taken to ensure a learner with WS cannot make their way out of the school building or off the school grounds.

It is interesting to note that the high levels of distractibility reported by parents and teachers contrast with reports of high quality prolonged engagement with tasks which the learner finds interesting. Distractibility has one advantage: if the learner is upset about something or is displaying other maladaptive behaviours it is likely she can be distracted by her special interests! Often a song is all it takes!

### Strategies:

- High expectations of pupil engagement and participation will go a long way. Encourage regularly, smile, and lamh sign your pleasure at her engagement. Praise her regularly to keep her engaged. Prevention rather than cure!
- Set realistic time-frames for when the learner will attend to tasks but demand her attention for that time-frame. Training her to work to a timer can be useful,

however, in some cases the timer serves as an additional stressor or distractor so you'll have to experiment to see.

- Use a reward system to keep her on task. This is very successful. The learner will do a task and then get a reward (this is best if organised as a choice plate, decide with her what the rewards could be and try to have an educational focus although this is not always possible e.g. play dough, listen to CD, read a book, go on a message, water the plants, play with toy cars, iPad etc.). The activity should be chosen before the task is done so you can remind her she is working for time to play with play dough. When she can focus for longer periods she may have two or three tasks to do before she will be rewarded. Start small though and build up, it'll be worth it. The five day Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) course organised by SESS is invaluable to learn how to use this approach successfully. You may even find that you'll need the support of a behaviour analyst to devise a behaviour plan. This can be accessed through the ABA course.
- Reduce sensory overload, particularly those of an auditory nature. You might experiment with playing music in the background, this may distract the learner more or you might find a piece of music that is settling to the learner and helps her to focus.
- Reiterate class rules using large visuals and get her to repeat them: quiet hands, quiet feet etc. This can be settling and get the learner ready to pay attention.
- Allow for very regular movement breaks (good for all learners ... this is done in all schools in Korea!) or allow her to take a break to go to e.g. the library corner for a few minutes.
- No research has been carried out on the use of the TEACCH approach for learners with WS although aspects of this are used very successfully by individual teachers. This includes the use of a visual schedules, first/then cards and having an individual work station. A learner with WS is very social but may need some time alone to focus on certain tasks. This needs to be explained to the learner, explain when the work station is used and for what reasons.
- Use the learner's special interests to enhance engagement in the task.
- Tap the table as a reminder to focus on a task (this works for all learners!).
- Avoid over use of a SNA to keep the learner focused. This can lead to poor self-regulation.
- Apply for a tablet for the learner and get a range of apps that would be suitable. On a day with high distractibility (particularly at infant level) you may need to select more work with concrete materials and use of a tablet to overcome distractibility. This is particularly the case if you can't get to the bottom of anxious behaviour. Some teachers have reported that days with very heavy rain have meant that the learner with WS has been totally distracted due to the sound of the rain. It's better to have a plan in place for this type of distraction, or you might both end up in tears before home time!

Over-activity

Profile: The learner with WS is likely to be over-active. This may manifest as having ADHD-like symptoms (indeed she is four times more likely than other children to have ADHD), or she may simply seem restless and need to be moving. She may tend to stand to do a task or she may seem to find excuses to be moving around the classroom. Learners themselves identify activities such as sports and arts as favoured school activities which implies they like activity and movement.

Strategies:

- High expectations will go a long way. Encourage her to sit, smile, lamh sign 'sitting', point to classroom rules and then praise her when she is sitting. Prevention rather than cure! She may also need to have the lamh sign for 'waiting' as she may find it difficult to sit when waiting e.g. waiting before lunches are taken out, waiting for every table to be tidy etc.
- Allow for very regular movement breaks (good for all learners ... this is done in all schools in Korea!) or allow her to take a break to go to e.g. the library corner for a few minutes.
- A kinaesthetic approach to your teaching is important (for all learners!). There should be activities in all lessons and time for peer interaction or collaborative work. This helps channel the over-activity associated with WS.
- You may need to consult with an OT regarding the use of specialised cushions which may help her to sit for longer.
- The use of methodologies that encourage pupil movement supports the learner with WS. Circle time where learners sit on the floor in a circle, station teaching where learners move from station to station, standing up for recitation of poems, use of language games where pupils have to turn to face their partner etc. all help as the learner has to get into different body positions. Just be aware that if pupils have to get onto the floor the learner with WS may be slow to lower herself to this position and to get up again due to the gross motor and visuo-spatial difficulties in WS.
- Use physical activities as a reward for the learner. Activities such as basketball will also serve to build up her muscles and help with co-ordination. Building in an OT programme throughout the school day can also be useful. However, this depends on the educational setting and is not always possible.

Poor adaptability

Profile: Many learners with WS find change difficult although this is common for so many learners with an intellectual disability. Changes can raise anxiety and insecurity in the learner with WS. Some teachers describe these traits as similar to autism spectrum disorder. Remember that for everyone, a knowledge and understanding of what is going to happen makes us feel secure and in control. Learners with WS are no different.

Strategies:

- Use of a visual schedule or first/then card allows the learner to know what has to be done now and what will happen afterwards.
- Use a transition card for the learner who finds change very difficult. This could be a coloured card or a symbol which means the current activity the learner is doing will finish in ten seconds. Never just stop an activity. Even just to say you have one more minute to finish your picture/worksheet will give all pupils a chance to finish the important parts of their work.
- Tell all the pupils in the class how long they have for an activity, if they cannot tell the time yet tell them when the big hand get to ... This way they can check for themselves if they have much time left.
- If something unexpected happens, reassure the learner and use the scripting as described for anxiety: 'I am safe at school, my teacher is with me, my teacher always helps me, my friends at school always help me' etc.

### Defiance/oppositionality

Profile: In line with high anxiety, individuals with WS are sometimes described as being oppositional or defiant. In my experience this is usually manifest when she feels threatened or feels she won't cope. She may use threatening language 'I won't do this and that's final' etc. It may help to think of how you'd feel if you were being asked to do something that for you is inconceivable ... to bungee jump, to eat raw meat etc. Think of the fear that elicits ... this sometimes is the world of WS.

However, it is also possible that defiance is linked to her wanting to get her own way. This can be a bit more complex. Sometimes in families where the child has special needs she can be allowed to get away with much more than a child without special needs. You may be the first person not to give in to her requests! This type of defiance is usually accompanied by 'I want ...' sentences and maybe a stamping of the foot.

### Strategies:

- Try to understand why the learner is being oppositional: what is the underlying fear or is she used to getting her own way? Don't assume the latter! Talk to her parents to discuss the root of the defiance. Doing the learner interview can sometimes reveal this type of information.
- Ensure what you are asking her to do is realistic and attainable.
- Avoid head on confrontation, try to distract her and get her to do the activity some other way.
- This is where trust is very important. Let her know you'll support her and help her with the task. You may even need to break up the task into smaller components and get her to do it bit by bit rather than all at once. It's less intimidating that way.
- If the defiance is to do with her wanting to get her own way be very consistent. Offer a choice: you can do the writing or you can go to time out. A child with WS on

time out will frequently try to get the attention of adults in the classroom to get their approval again. The time out chair should be looking away from the class.

- Refer the learner again to their first/then card, show them what they are working towards if they have a behaviour chart.
- NEVER take away a reward from a learner due to defiance or other behaviours. Rewards should be given for good work, compliance, effort, achieving targets etc. but once given they should not be taken away. This causes HUGE upset and will affect the relationship of trust between learner and teacher. What's the point in working for something if the teacher can take it away again?
- This links with emotionality. Encourage the learner to use words to describe why they don't want to do the activity.
- Consider singing a response to the learner or distracting her with a song until she is calm enough to engage with you again.
- The five day Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) course organised by SESS is invaluable to set up an appropriate system to prevent this type of behaviour. You may even find that you'll need the support of a behaviour analyst to devise a behaviour plan.