

Life skills

Profile: Learners with WS usually have some level of difficulty with self-care skills and with life-skills due primarily to fine-motor and visuo-spatial difficulties. This translates as difficulties dressing, toileting, showering, eating, preparing food and general organisation (such as tidying up). Within each of these areas are needs: putting on a jumper the correct way round, tying buttons, tying zips, tying laces, tucking in a shirt etc. are some aspects of the challenges in dressing. In special schools, and often in special classes, there is a very strong emphasis on developing these skills. Mainstream schools should also adopt consider prioritising life skills. This should be done in conjunction with parents to select appropriate targets, as not all skills can be developed at one time. Parents admit that they frequently do the life skills for their child because it saves time and hassle. However, if these skills are not taught in school they are unlikely to be taught in adult services. There is also a trend in mainstream schools for SNAs of learners with WS to either help her with life skills or do them for her. This should be avoided. These skills need to be taught. The most qualified person to do this is the teacher.

Strategies:

- Prioritise a life skill to be developed in conjunction with parents and with the learner herself. Toileting should be considered as there are child protection issues at play if she cannot toilet independently.
- A task analysis should be done and shared with parents. [Click here to see an example of a task analysis of toileting for a learner with WS.](#)
- As with teaching any skills to the learner, she will need a lot of encouragement and praise for her efforts.
- It can help to set the instructions of the tasks to music or to a rhythm.
- Ensure the teacher teaches the skills, they can be reinforced and supported by the SNA as necessary.
- Assign these tasks for homework so parents are involved in this life-skill development in a structured way.
- Celebrate successes in this area.
- The use of social stories to show how skills are learned or why they are necessary can be useful.
- Check with parents if the learner is availing of occupational therapy. If not you may wish to suggest a referral if you feel it is needed. If the learner has an OT report you should follow the recommendations as laid out and seek advice at any stage with regard to life-skill development. If a programme has been developed clarify with parents who does what. If parents are doing the OT programme at home it may be worth including this on the learner's homework list. Learners frequently do what teachers want, it's harder when an instruction comes from a parent.

- Avoid over use of a SNA to organise the belongings of learners with WS. This can lead to poor development of life-skills.
- Avoid the 'velcro model' of SNA support. Encourage the SNA to let the learner put on her own coat, open her lunch box etc. even if this takes more time.

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