Exceptional Strategies for Success - Adults

I think it goes without saying that many of Marcia’s techniques and tips described by Wendy for children are as applicable to adults: whether that’s in an educational setting or when thinking about daytime activities and perhaps making choices.

Marcia’s idea to “build on cognitive strengths to address weaknesses” makes absolute sense or, in other words, let’s use the good bits! I don’t mean to be flippant, but just think of the skills that someone has when introducing new ideas or programmes of activities. Marcia points out that long term memory can be a way of introducing new ideas through association. So maybe when thinking about future journeys or travels, introduce the concept through a past holiday or visit. Familiarity straight away could start to relieve any potential anxiety.

Another top tip is to use the group the person is in to instruct and direct an activity, so the person his or herself is involved, but not directly in terms of taking instruction. This helps to relieve the “I don’t want to be the centre of attention” problem. It’s so important to play to someone’s strengths.

Sometimes I get calls from families who are frustrated that something has happened during the day (they know because they have had the call from college, day service etc) and they can’t get their son/daughter to talk to them about it. How about this tip from Marcia don’t start by asking “what happened today” - this is too direct and open-ended but try instead “Today when you were out with John and you wanted a coffee……”. This way you are giving a context and unfolding the story. You are also asking for the story to be finished off, which plays to their strength or need to finish something off. Another tip could be using a scenario that has a high interest rate. For example, use a “scene” from a favourite TV programme or use a favourite character to introduce what you want to talk about. This way you’re incorporating “high interest material” so levels of engagement go up and you may get a better response.

My final top tip from Marcia is about money. What exactly do people need to be able to do when they are out and about at the local shop making a purchase?

Well Marcia thought it was OK to “round things up” to the next pound. So don’t get hung up trying to teach £1.36, i.e. what coins you need to make this amount etc., but round it up to £2. When I started work in day services, this idea was very successful as we were working with older people who had been living in long stay hospitals, where everything was a pound. Once they were living in the community, they found it really frustrating trying to identify different coins and in the end would just round it up anyway - no problem. I will say though that there was always someone with them when they were out, so getting their change was not a problem - perhaps that’s worth bearing in mind.