

Achieving the Impossible:

7 Ways to Have Highly Engaged Older Students in Speech Therapy



1 Identify Their Why

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No matter how your student arrives to speech therapy, if they are not ready to learn, your therapy IS finding out what is going on in their life. Why are they upset? Why are they bored? Why are they embarrassed? Envision how your speech therapy can address this issue.

2 Identify Their Highest Value Target

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What are they struggling with? What class is the most difficult? What is going on in their life? If you can create therapy topics that address what is top-of-mind for them, they are more likely to engage. Due to developing executive function skills, young adults don't always have the ability to set down what they are worried about or thinking about the most, so run with it.



3 Use Grade Level Materials

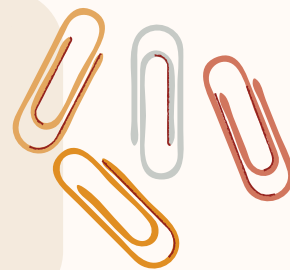
Children can be disengaged for many reasons. However, if your materials and topics are below their age-level, they might be polite and not say anything but will still be bored. The easiest way to stay in line with what is expected is to use nonfiction topics like history or biographies, dive into math (word problems), or science.

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4 Use Their Homework for Therapy

The truth is that many of the students that we work with don't have support for their homework but would still like to feel proud sometimes by getting an A. Homework can be your therapy topic as long as you look at it through a speech therapy lens. Teach abilities that generalize, not specific content.



5 Make Deals to Create Empowerment

When friction arises, we typically have two paths we can take, punishment or reward. However, there is a middle ground where a student acts in a certain way and everyone benefits. Here's what it looks like: if a student can get to the session on time, you won't pick him up in front of his friends. If you work on X for 20 minutes, we will do Y for the last 10. Lean heavy on technology with this strategy. Often times a student is just really excited to share something with you or members of the group. Head over to YouTube or Spotify to check it out after the work is complete.

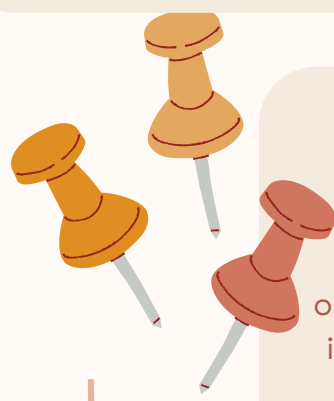
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6 Use Humor

Teens love humor and one of the greatest ways to create engagement and to make a connection is to get them to laugh. What is funny to them? What have they seen on the internet lately that has made them laugh? One of my favorite strategies is to try to use whatever saying is the most popular.

Guaranteed that I will get it wrong which causes fits of laughter. This is a much better way to get them to produce longer, more complex utterances that I correct. Because they then get to improve my (dated) utterance with their corrections. So much fun on our part to learn from them too.



7 Use High Interest Targets

We have control over so little in our speech pathology world it seems. One thing we have complete control over is the topic of our therapy. Young adults get fixated on topics quickly. Whether it is a game, a movie, a channel, or some activity. Make that central to your speech therapy if your goals allow. They will be able to compare and contrast, answer questions, speak at length, or follow directions to build something that is meaningful to them. Once you have proof of the ability, you can try to generalize it over to topics that align with the curriculum.

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