

## Focus, Attention and Concentration

Some children find it difficult to sustain their attention particularly to a given task. This can be due to frustration, and/or sensory sensitivities or underlying anxiety. Monitoring their behaviour can often be helpful to identify potential causes and solutions.

Attention is the process that enables an individual to focus on the relevant information whilst ignoring all the non-relevant information. This means that a person must demonstrate the capacity to sustain their attention, by maintaining his or her focus on the important aspects of the task they are engaged in, without becoming confused or pulled off task by unimportant distractions.

In the classroom there are a lot of distractions both visual and auditory, making it difficult for some children to focus and sustain their attention. A lot of pictures on the wall, other children moving about or clicking their pen can distress some children, increasing their alertness levels and making it difficult for them to concentrate.

### Structuring the environment to help children

- Think carefully about the classroom display boards
- If possible, children who have difficulty with attention avoid sitting them in a position where others have to frequently move past them, near a door that opens often or near a window. This will be particularly important when children are being asked to engage in tasks they find difficult or are expected to follow detailed instructions.
- Ensure that there is sufficient light and flow of air where children are seated to enhance concentration and attention.
- Eliminate as much unnecessary noise and visual stimuli (objects on the desk or near the desk, highly decorative walls) as possible to prevent children from becoming distracted.
- Close the classroom door if noise is being generated in the corridor or space outside the classroom.
- Consider providing children with a workstation or study booth. These can be moveable and effective; however, only used when children are required to attend to their work.
- If possible, create a quiet corner for children to go if they become too 'sensitive' and disturbed.



### Initiating and sustaining attention in the classroom

- Provide children with a checklist of tasks to be completed at the start of work tasks, e.g. 'Collect pencil – Write date'. This could be laminated for children to tick off tasks as they go.
- A now and next board or visual timetable may help children with progressing through and transitioning between tasks.



- Provide children with a sand timer to show them how long they are expected to work on a task. Set clear expectations for what should be completed within the set time, e.g. three lines of writing.
- Discuss ideas with children to help them initiate the task, writing their ideas down on a small white board may help them to focus on the task.
- Engage children in posture preparation activities before commencing work tasks. These activities can help a person to attend and focus, by calming and organising the sensory system. **See also information on Calming Ideas and Alerting Ideas**

## Strategies to help children follow instructions

- Ensure that children are giving eye contact and are focused before any instructions are given.
- Give children only one or two directions at a time. If children are given a three-part command or more, they may only act on the last instruction given.
- Break difficult activities down into steps and provide one step at a time.
- Use short, simple language when giving directions. Avoid complicating instructions.
- If required repeat verbal directions slowly and clearly.
- Give children a reasonable amount of time to process what is being asked.
- Give children a visual cue/demonstration or physical assistance, when necessary to help them understand what is being asked.
- Reduce auditory distractions for example, be aware of the setting when instructions are being given.

