

Attention and Concentration

INTRODUCTION

A child needs to be able to focus his/her attention to carry out everyday tasks at home and school. The environment plays an important part in attention. A child also needs his/her internal sensory needs to be met in order to concentrate and alternate between seated and movement tasks. This can be achieved through movement breaks. All the activities in this leaflet can be used at home to prepare for homework or other focussed tasks including family meal times and getting dressed. There is also information about activities and provision which can be made in class to increase a child's focus and attention.

At Home

To support children with maintaining attention throughout the day the inclusion of movement breaks can be beneficial

Many of the activities can be done as part of a routine

- Helping around the house moving chairs, tidying up
- Heavy work jobs including carrying shopping
- Chair push ups
- Push/pulling activities
- Pressing hands together

Environment

- Set up a workstation for homework tasks i.e. table facing a blank wall away from windows and doors
- Reduce noise where possible i.e. switch off TV, Music appliances, shut the door when possible
- Music can help concentration for some and distract for others. Trial music, allow the child to listen through headphones.
- Fidget toys can help your child concentrate when listening. Allow the child to hold something small while listening i.e. blu-tac, button
- Limit the amount of materials on the table/desk
- Ensure the desk/table and chair are suitable. Use cushions and foot stools/box to ensure the child feels comfortable and can reach the task. Your child will feel more secure if his/her feet are flat on the floor or on a box/stool.
- When carrying out homework allow your child to stand and stretch between sections of homework, or to do chair push-ups, wall push-ups or floor push-ups.

Improving Attention

- Use visual timetables to plan your day
- Use a card board cut out overlay to help focus when reading books
- Develop attention span by playing games such as Kim's game; place a number of objects on a tray, let the child look at them, remove one object when the child isn't looking and see if they can remember what is missing. Increase the number of objects to increase the challenge.
- Play pairs memory game either with playing cards or specific pairs cards. Turn them face down and try to find a pair. You need to remember where they are.
- Memory games ie I went to the shops and bought....., remember the list and add a new item each time. This game can also be played with actions.
- Alternative seating options such as a therapy ball placed in an inner tube to keep it steady will allow the child to move while still seated at the task, this movement may enhance their concentration.

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File Path:Child Health AHP/OT/Tayside/Pre-Ref.Workstream/Pre-Ref.Advice Sheets

In School

- Consistent routines, careful organisation and a predictable format of activities will help an easily distracted child to focus. Specific and smooth well defined transitions from one activity to the next will all help to make the school experience a more positive one.
- Break longer activities down into steps, children will attend and concentrate better if activities are kept short.
- Use the child's name before giving an instruction
- Give the child movement breaks between sections of work i.e. going across the classroom to sharpen a pencil or to collect an item for the next section of work/activity.
- Having the child face you when you want them to listen to you is helpful, come around to the front of the child's desk rather than standing over their shoulder or sit directly opposite the child if in a group setting.
- Create a space where the child can move to or move around in to have a movement break without disturbing the rest of the class.
- Fidget toys can help a child concentrate when listening. Allow the child to fiddle with a small object in their hand or pocket e.g. a koosh ball, a pipe-cleaner or a tangle while listening.
- Ensure that seating is appropriate i.e. desk/table is the right height, chairs are the right size, with the child being able to sit comfortably with feet flat on the floor, cushions and/or a foot box/stool can be used to enhance seating to make it comfortable for the child.
- A wobble cushion can help a child to receive movement sensations while remaining in their seat.

Transition from one activity to another

Children with attention difficulties may find it difficult to start work, finish tasks and switch from one task to another. But there are some simple strategies which can help.

- Get the child to talk through what they are going to do prior to starting an activity, reminding them of instructions.
- Give the child help to get started on a task, remind them of the first step, ensure that they have organised the materials they will need.
- Use timetables/schedules (pictorial or written) that the child can refer to and know what is happening next. Checklists can be used to enable the child to monitor their progress through a task.
- Give warnings that the time for a task is coming to an end, egg timers are great as they can see the sand running through to help them to be aware of how long they have left for a task and to mentally prepare to move onto the next task.
- Help the child to organise their materials at the end of a task, returning items to their designated place to allow the child to find them easily when doing that task again.