

STRATEGIES TO AID CONCENTRATION AND ATTENTION IN THE CLASSROOM

The following strategies address some of the common environmental factors that can affect a child's concentration and attention in the classroom. It is suggested that these strategies are introduced to the whole class, who are then encouraged to use them to regulate their own behaviour and concentration.

Privacy boards - These three-sided structures can be placed on the desk to allow a child to work privately. They reduce the potential for visual distraction and should be kept deliberately plain.

Keeping the walls bare - Teachers are encouraged to keep visual displays and information away from the main teaching area at the front of the class, particularly around the white board area. This will allow the child to focus on the teacher. Additional child-specific prompts can be placed on the child's desk when appropriate.

Provide a coloured place mat - Use a piece of brightly coloured paper as a place mat underneath the child's work to help the child focus on the task on the desk.

Reducing auditory (noise) distractions

Ear defenders or ear plugs - Provide a box of ear defenders for children to use for short periods of time (up to 20 minutes) when they want to concentrate on a particular piece of work.

A quiet space - Provide a quite area with minimal distractions (outside of the classroom but not in a corridor!) that children can go to if they want to concentrate on their work.

Carpet - use carpet to dampen noise in a busy classroom.

Providing fidget aids

Fidget toys - Some children find it easier to focus if they are allowed to fiddle with something while the teacher is talking. Try offering a piece of Blue Tac or objects such as those available from www.specialdirect.com Help children to identify the object that helps them to focus, rather than those that are distracting.

At break time:

- Drink cold or iced water, especially through a straw of sports bottle
- Pat cold water on the face
- Eat chewy food e.g. raisins, chunks of cheese, bagels, fruity cereal bar
- Or chew something crunchy e.g. popcorn, apples, nuts
- Listen to loud, fast music (may be good before doing homework)
- Encourage active play, for example running, using a mini trampoline, swinging, climbing, sliding

Adding movement

Wobble cushion - Some children need movement in order to concentrate. Provide a few wobble cushions (such as those available from www.skfservices.com) that children can sit on. These provide movement without the child having to leave their seat.

Exercises - Whole class alerting programme

Some commercial programmes are available that use physical activity to get the children ready for learning. Incorporating a few exercises into the daily classroom routine after registration and lunch will benefit children who need to regulate their arousal levels in order to be ready to learn and attend. Ideas include:

- Children shake their hands, arms, feet and legs then the whole body (sitting or standing)
- On the spot jumping with both feet
- Stamping with alternate feet
- Hand pushes – hold the hands as is praying, and alternately push with the left and right hands
- Press down on the top of the head with both hands
- Chair push-ups
- Perform “finger loop” exercises, touching the thumb to the tip of each finger in turn



Motor breaks - Channel a child's urge to wander by asking them to carry out a motor task, preferably one that involved "heavy work" such as carrying, pushing or pulling. Activities include taking the register (which is hidden in a pile of heavy books) and pulling the mats out for gym.

Provide appropriate seating

Appropriate chairs - Carry out a "seat audit", making sure that all children are sitting on a chair that allows their feet to touch the floor and their bottoms to touch the back of the chair. "Bucket chairs" are to be avoided.

Sloping desk - Provide a number of sloping writing desks for children to use in the classroom. These encourage a good, alert sitting posture and encourage a more even pencil pressure when writing.

Organise the desk

Reduce desk clutter - Keep desks clear of clutter. Where necessary use tape to make the place on the desk where important equipment should go. Put equipment into easily accessible pots and containers.

Consistent touch pressure

Provide a lap tray - Provide a lap tray (those with a beanbag on the bottom and tray on the top) or a heavy bean-filled toy for children to put on their laps while working. This often helps a child to feel "grounded" and can help them to stay in their seat.

Position the child appropriately - Children who are sensitive to touch can become quite anxious if they feel they may be unexpectedly bumped or jostled. Position their chair so that others won't regularly pass behind them.