

Strategies to Get Young Children to Pay Attention!

Focus: Being able to concentrate, remain alert and oriented for a period of time despite external and internal distractions.

We can build children's ability to focus and pay attention over time. The trick?

- 1) Figure out *why* the child is having difficulty
- 2) Meet the *need* behind the lack of focus and attention

Potential reasons for lacking focus paired with effective strategies that match

Sleepy?

(When tired, we all start to lose the ability to focus.)

- Provide a quiet place to rest and regroup
- Turn up the lights
- Include more movement
- Sing a song or dance
- Let the child take a break

Stressed?

(Stress hormones go up as the day goes on, especially in group settings.)

- Provide a movement break, take a walk, or other exercise
- Turn on a children's yoga video
- Practice deep/slow breathing
- Offer a break in the calm-down-area
- Start a "Quiet time"
- Play soothing music
- Provide a hug or cuddle time
- Listen to the child and validate their feelings

Has the "Highly Distractible" temperament trait? (Can you say "squirrel!?!")

- Provide a simpler, less-distracting space so the child can focus better
- Take extra distractions away from the environment
- Allow to do activities one on one, when possible
- Provide calming music
- Have child sit next to you
- Avoid labeling the child negatively

Focus Fatigue?

(Each and every human has their limit – for adults, an average of 45 minutes listening is all we can take. So, how short is it for our youngest?)

- Break learning up into smaller bits
- Take a break
- Build in a ton of free play
- Encourage a mental break (drink water, bathroom break, snack break)
- Get up and get moving

Hungry?

(How do you feel and behave when you get "HANGRY"?)

- Give them a snack
- Provide water
- Redirect and/or distract the child
- Change snack time earlier to accommodate

Not interested in the content?

(How long does it take for adults to get bored with content they are not interested in? 90 seconds.)

- Provide engaging topics that match the children's interests
- Include visuals, pictures, puppets, and other interesting props (especially those children can hold)
- Use humor and make it fun
- Ask questions to get them interested
- Make a connection to their favorite things
- Allow choices
- Puppets that go with the book(s) you are reading

Child has the "Highly Activity" temperament trait? (I have got to shake, shake, shake my sillies out!...)

- Give a calming fidget or other "focus" toy
- Make the book or learning activity movement-based
- Take to the gym or outside as much as possible
- Provide a "sitting cushion" at story time
- Give plenty of movement breaks and dance parties
- Help "get the wiggles out" before expected to sit

Developmental Stage?

(Toddlers have difficulty focusing and sitting for long periods.)

- Practice acceptance
- Lower expectations
- Shorten what you are doing with the child
- Keep things busy for them and allow times to jump from one thing to another
- Keep encouraging their learning abilities over time
- Break down the activity