

Parent Information Sheet

Improving Concentration

Everyone needs to be able to focus and concentrate in order to complete tasks. The length of time for which we are able to do this depends on age and on the activity we are doing. Young children in schools – and at home – need to develop the ability to focus on a task, and also to stay still long enough to listen to and follow instructions.

Most children, especially younger ones, will find this difficult from time to time. Teachers in primary schools are actively discouraged from keeping children sitting and listening for too long. Other factors such as tiredness, hunger, over-stimulation or emotional upset will also affect a child's ability to concentrate.



Experts say that a reasonable attention span to expect of a child is two to three minutes per year of their age. That's the period of time for which a typical child can maintain focus on a given task:

- 2 years old: four to six minutes
- 4 years old: eight to 12 minutes
- 6 years old: 12 to 18 minutes
- 8 years old: 16 to 24 minutes
- 10 years old: 20 to 30 minutes

There are many things that you can do at home to help your child to develop their concentration – a vital skill for all, not just those who may find it difficult. Trying these simple tricks may well have a significant impact on your child's ability to focus. Concentration and memory are like a muscle – the more you work them, the stronger they become. Don't expect too much too soon; instead look for small gains, and don't forget to praise your child for the efforts they make to improve their concentration. Try these activities at home:

- **Make Sure Their Basic Needs Are Met** - Children and teenagers need a decent amount of good quality sleep every night, so make sure your bedtime routine is a good one. Reduce sugar intake as this can lead to sudden spikes and dramatic falls in energy levels. Increase protein intake with good quality lean meat, fish, nuts and eggs, which stimulate levels of dopamine, a hormone which makes concentration easier. Ensure your child is carrying out some form of physical activity on a daily basis, preferably outdoors.
- **Create the Mood for Concentration** - Find out what helps your child to concentrate. It may be calming music, softer lighting or peace – some people even believe a fish tank with some fish helps concentration.
- **Play 'Beat the Clock'** - Find an egg timer or use the timer/alarm function on a clock or phone. Start with small time intervals such as five minutes and challenge your child to concentrate on an activity until the alarm goes off. Gradually increase the time intervals.

- **Remove Distractions** - Think about what things may be preventing your child from concentrating and remove or minimize them. Examples might include televisions, music, noise, people, lighting, tiredness, hunger or interruptions.
- **Try Some Sequencing and Organisation Activities** - Sequencing things really helps to develop concentration. Try following a recipe, setting the table or putting objects in alphabetical order. Alternatively, try a board game or card game.
- **Break It Up** - Break big tasks up into bite-size pieces, to be tackled one at a time. Useful alongside 'Beat the Clock'. Also encourage goal-setting, perhaps with rewards for each goal completed (a reward can be something as simple as a 5 minute run round outside).
- **Creativity** - Bring creativity to tasks your child doesn't enjoy. A kid who dislikes maths won't focus well on maths homework, so let him/her work out problems in paint on an easel / whiteboard / scrap paper first and then copy the work onto the homework sheet later.
- **Fidget Toy** - Try using fidgets, a range of products that children can manipulate while focusing on other tasks. Anything can be a fidget – a spinner, blu-tack, cube, beads, smooth stone or feely ball.
- **Check** - Check in frequently with your child when they're working on hard tasks. A kid who feels overwhelmed or confused by the project they're working on will check out and get distracted quickly. At the beginning of the task, help them identify potential stumbling blocks. If question 5 seems especially daunting, for example, start with that one and help your child figure out how to approach it or do the questions you can achieve first to feel a sense of achievement.
- **Check the Tasks** - Tasks need to match a child's maturity levels. Make sure what your child is doing is neither too hard nor too easy. However, it's worth also reminding your child that we all have to do tasks that are tedious, and the sooner we tackle them, the sooner they will be done!
- **Memory Games** - There are lots of cheap 'lotto' style activities in the shops – games where players have to find matching pairs of cards. Alternatively, play 'Kim's Game' where items on a tray have to be memorised and then listed, or 'I Went To Market And I Bought...'
- **Find Out What Motivates Your Child to Concentrate** - Everyone learns in different ways – some people are visual, others verbal, some prefer physical, 'hands-on' activities – and the same is true for concentration. Find out which style suits your child and provide activities that go with it. What activities does your child 'get lost in'? Provide similar activities to help them to concentrate. Caution: most children can 'get lost in' time spent watching TV or using electronic devices. However, this is often not true concentration, rather a zoning out. Overuse of electronic devices can actually reduce a child's ability to concentrate, so make sure you are limiting screen time to a reasonable amount.
- **Don't Overwhelm Your Child with Activities** - Make sure your child has proper 'down time' every day to enable them to recharge their batteries.