



EARLY YEARS - GETTING READY TO LOOK, LISTEN AND PLAY

Good attention and concentration helps children to learn. Most skills in life need to be learnt through repeated practice; things like tying shoelaces, writing, using scissors or riding a bike. Children need to be able to focus on a task and practice an activity to improve their skills. Learning to concentrate and complete activities helps to reduce impulsive behaviour and can lower activity levels, which can be calming.

CONCENTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Toddlers

With their growing independence and developing physical skills, many young toddlers are very active and struggle to sit still. They are impulsive and will knock down the blocks before they have built the tower; they want to touch a toy before it is their turn! Self-control is only just developing at this stage and having to wait for even a few seconds is often very difficult.

Young Children

The Pre-Schooler can usually concentrate on an activity for longer. Self-control is developing and their growing development of language means that they can describe their actions, which helps them to plan and organise. They can sit with you and play simple board games, waiting their turn, or listen to you read a book. But don't expect good concentration if your child is tired, hungry or ill. Also consider the situation and environment you are in. For instance, parks are for running around. Having lots of friends or toys around will excite young children, so, don't expect too much in these situations.

WHAT YOU CAN DO?

- Make sure your child is getting lots of fun, active play to burn up energy such as running, climbing, throwing and catching, playing on playground equipment etc.
- Remove distractions when your child needs to concentrate e.g. turn off the television and find a quiet, uncluttered space. Sudden sounds/ images make us look up and break our train of thought.



- Help your child to “stay put” by sitting them at a table, or playing in a cardboard box. Many children respond well to the feeling of security and focus that it gives them.
- Begin with short, easily completed tasks that give success. Offer opportunities for turn taking to reduce impulsiveness. If your child’s concentration wanders, involve yourself in the game and encourage them to stay with the task for as long as possible. Give concrete goals such as 10 more minutes, 5 more turns or 3 more pages.
- Give lots of descriptive praise: “good sitting at the table”; “well done for listening to the story”.
- Give your child clear, calm instructions and break down tasks into simple steps. Set reasonable limits on behaviour by using consistent rules and routines. Stay patient, calm and positive.

SOME ACTIVITIES TO TRY

- Memory card games - Play a game where you have to find the pairs, turning over cards, two at a time. For a 4-year-old child start with 10 cards.
- Early board games – Try making your own games by drawing squares on paper. Ask questions, and your child moves ahead two spaces if they are correct, and stays the same if they are incorrect. The winner is the first to get to the end of the track!
- Listening games – You can play this game, say three words and one is the odd one out. E.g. table, chair, sand. Play Simon Says with two or three instructions such as clap twice then touch your toes, walk to the door, knock twice then open the door. Play musical bobs or statues.
- Building and Construction – Encourage your child to work slowly and carefully. Help them to plan and think about alternatives. What do we need? What should we do first? What will happen next?
- Books – Adapt books to suit your child’s needs. Simplify the words, talk about the pictures, and add play sounds or repetitive phrases. If your child gets restless, turn each page quickly with short comments and use their finger to point to what you are talking about. Always get to the end, and say “Good reading, we have finished the book.”
- Make a “calm down corner” – somewhere to go if your child is over-excited. Provide soothing music, calming massage, cushions and a heavy quilt to relax in and a stress ball to squeeze.

