



Productivity (School) Advice Pack

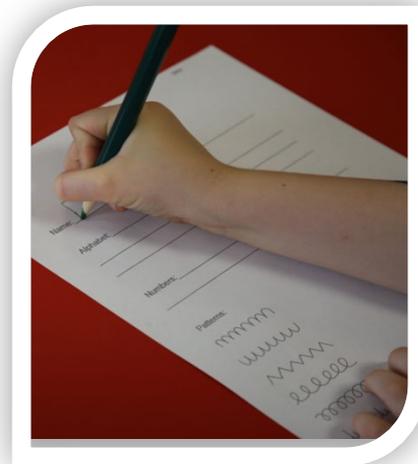
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Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Handwriting

There are a variety of reasons as to why children may find difficulty in the important skill of handwriting. This skill requires a complex integration of the following; bilateral coordination (using both sides of the body together), postural stability, wrist stability and hand strength, finger isolation, thumb opposition (the ability of your thumb to touch the opposite side of your hand), in hand manipulation, fine motor and visual perception skills.



Possible difficulties children may experience

1. Incorrect pencil grip
2. Poor spacing of words and/or letters
3. Excessive use or lack of pressure when writing
4. Hand fatigue when writing or slow handwriting for expected age
5. Poor letter formation

Strategies to support the child in developing this skill

Warm up exercises: Before writing, do some quick warm up exercises so the hand muscles are warm, stretched and ready to work.

- *Shoulder shrug:* Lift shoulders up to touch the ears. Hold for 3 seconds and then relax. Repeat this 5 times
- *Chair push ups:* Sitting on a chair, place hands on the seat and push down until the bottom lifts up off the seat. Try and hold this for 3 seconds. Repeat 5 times
- *Palm pushes:* Place hands together so the palms are touching with elbows are out to the side. Push palms hard against each other keeping the force equal, for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times
- *Hand pulls:* Put palms together and link the fingers. Try to pull fingers apart, but keep hands together causing a pull for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times
- *Arm wrap:* Cross the arms over chest and hold onto the shoulders, give a big squeeze for 3 seconds. Repeat 3 times

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- *Hand-shakes*: Shake and wiggle the fingers as fast as possible, continue whilst lifting arms above the head. Hand-shakes can also be carried out under a desk in school. Repeat this 3 times
- *Finger drumming*: With hands placed on the desk, tap the fingers individually onto the table starting with the thumb, tapping each finger individually. Next tap from the little finger to the thumb. Start off slowly and get quicker and quicker. Repeat this 3 times

Writing interval exercises:

- Shrug shoulders up and down then circle shoulders forward and backwards
- Turn head from side to side holding for a few seconds
- Touch right ear with right shoulder then left ear with left shoulder
- Clasp hands together with arms extended in front and behind body
- Circle wrists in both directions then move wrists up and down
- Stretch fingers out straight and then wiggle them around
- Take regular short walks e.g. walk into another room, make yourself a drink etc

Developing Visual Motor Integration - Visual motor integration refers to the co-ordination of our hands and eyes to produce a controlled movement. Below are activity suggestions to develop the pre-writing skills.

Multi Sensory Shapes - Use multi-sensory experiences e.g. sand, chalk, paint (fingers and brushes), foam on tiles, crayons, felt tips, charcoal. Use different paper, (sandpaper, cardboard, tracing paper) and alter the child's position e.g. standing at easel, lying on tummy on floor. Draw around cardboard letters/shapes. Concentrate on pre-writing shapes:



Tracing - First trace around simple shapes and eventually progress to pictures. Initially use fingers then move onto pencil or crayon.

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Maze – start with larger lined mazes moving onto more complex outlines.

Colouring - Aim to colour within boundaries. Use boundaries that are thick raised or textured. PVA glue makes good raised borders.

Dot to dot - Join dots randomly progressing to a structured dot to dot.

Use thick markers or big pieces of chalk to enable the child to have a better grip (look out for egg-shaped chalk)

Play-dough – Draw a letter, and have the child roll out pieces of play-dough and fit and mould them together to make that letter's shape.

Spaghetti – Do the same as above with cooked spaghetti. Colour small batches with food colouring to make it more fun.

Practice direction – Encourage the child to practice the direction that their pencil travels for different shapes of letters e.g. drawing a circle anticlockwise. You can use arrows to demonstrate this.



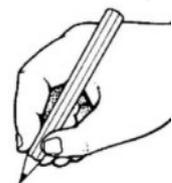
Developing letter and number formation

- Collect different forms of letters made out of sponge, magnets, card, sandpaper, tin foil etc and ask the child to collect together the same letters although they are made of something different
- Use alphabet cards with letters on them. Try playing snap with them to encourage the child to look carefully at the difference between letters.
- Play Pairs with alphabet cards – see if they can find pairs of letters
- Try writing different shapes in the air with their finger – using big movements to emphasise the direction of the letter
- Ask them to form letters with their finger in different things such as shaving foam, sand, paint

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- Use rough sand paper and write letters in chalk or wax crayon on to the paper so that there is sensory feedback and it slows the formation down. These letters are quite difficult for some children
- Take it in turns to write a letter or number in yellow highlighter pen and the other person writes over the top of it with black felt tip or black pencil crayon
- Place a skipping rope, tinsel or scarves on the floor to form letters. Encourage the child to walk over these shapes with bare feet to get a feel for the direction that they travel as if they were a pencil
- Practice writing with a paintbrush and water on a dry pavement
- Use a ribbon, scarf or tinsel to form large letters/ numbers in the air in front of the body with large arm movements, talk about the movement needed for each
- Place markers on the floor to form letters. Encourage the child to crawl/ walk/ run/ jump/ hop around the letter/ number outline in the correct direction
- Ask the child to close their eyes and on the palm of her hand draw letters, ask the child to guess what the letter is. If the hand is too tickly this can be done as a large letter on the back instead. Take it in turns to be the one drawing and the one guessing
- Ensure your child is aware of the direction their pencil needs to travel to form each letter. You can draw arrows to demonstrate this.

Developing Tripod Grip - The 'tripod' refers to the use of thumb, index finger and middle finger on the pen or pencil and ideally fingers need to be positioned well-down the pen/pencil shaft.



- Encourage pressing a spring clothes peg using only the pads of the index finger and the thumb for practice
- Taking each hand in turn, encourage wiggling individual fingers and thumbs. Then encourage touching the tip of the thumb with the tip of each finger in turn
- Observe how the child grasps the pencil. Encourage holding the pencil not too close to the tip and not too far away from it
- Try a soft foam pencil gripper or elastic band to help them see where they need to place their fingers. Show the child how to tuck their fingers away to support the pencil

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- To help improve posture and pencil control the child may benefit from sitting more upright using a sloped board or table

Pencil control - Activities that encourage the muscles on either side of the shoulders to pull together will help the child to hold the shoulder joints steady while the arms are moved in various directions. The following activities will encourage stability and smooth arm control.

Using a blackboard or easel - Ask the child to sit in front of the board: they should be able to reach the board with elbows fairly straight so that movements start at the shoulder.

- Ask the child to draw vertical or horizontal on the board with chalk held in each hand
- Clean the board with a board rubber or wet paper towel
- Give the child a wet paintbrush and ask them to “paint” the board

Other activities

- Varying positions such as in standing, half kneeling, lying on floor with the paper attached to the underneath of the table and lying on your tummy
- Use a stick to write or draw pictures in the sand
- Play “fishing” games with magnetic rods

Writing Position

- Ensure they are sat in a good sitting position, with hips, knees and ankles at 90° i.e. feet should be flat on the floor or supported on a small step
- Position so that the elbows are flexed (bent) to 90, arms should rest on the table with shoulders relaxed
- Forearm should be at 45 degrees in relation to the table and 2/3 of the forearm should rest on the table
- Non-writing arm should support the paper
- Paper should be slanted for cursive writing / upright for printing
- Do not hold the pen/pencil too close to the nib/tip

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- Take regular breaks from sitting in this position (see interval exercises)

Increasing pencil pressure (when handwriting looks faint)

- Place a piece of carbon paper between two pieces of paper, tell the child if they press hard enough it will come through on the blank piece of paper like magic
- Pens which light up when you press hard, the aim is to write a sentence and make the pen light up as much as possible.

Reducing heavy pencil pressure (when handwriting looks too bold)

- Regularly undertake a series of exercises whereby pressure is placed through the upper limbs, i.e. crawling games, wheelbarrows, elephant walks
- Provide a light-up pen which can be bought cheaply from stationary shops. Challenge the child to write so that the pen does not light up
- Use a mouse mat or piece of felt underneath the writing paper, as excessive pressure will make a hole! Encourage them to write without puncturing the paper
- Try writing on different textured surfaces (on the patio with chalk, on paper whilst leaning on carpet)
- Ghost writing. Have the child write a word lightly on the paper and then erase it without leaving any marks. The child wins if they can do this. Cue them by saying, "Lift the pencil tip off of the paper" as they write

See the handwriting equipment advice sheet for further information on equipment that may be helpful in developing this skill.

Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Using Scissors

Cutting skills take time for children to develop. Being able to use scissors to cut well is important for many preschool and school activities including art and craft. Children may have the skills to use small scissors by 3 to 4 years of age, but scissor skills are not fully developed until 6 years of age.

To use scissors effectively, children require skills in the following areas; sitting balance, hand strength, fine motor abilities including finger isolation, development of a preferred hand for activity, good hand eye coordination and bilateral integration (using both sides of the body together).



Possible difficulties children may experience

- Unable to adopt the correct sitting posture to take part in the activity
- Difficulty in gripping the scissors in order to use them functionally
- Difficulty in coordinating both hands to effectively cut around shapes
- Difficulty in planning and coordinating the movement of the scissors whilst cutting
- Ability to isolate their fingers and thumb when positioning their hand on the scissors

Strategies to support the child in developing this skill

- Check that there is enough space to practice the cutting task on the table
- Show the child how to hold scissors correctly by demonstrating. Talk about where your fingers are inside the scissors. Let the child try to copy this.
- If it is difficult for the child to open and close the scissors to cut, let them practice this action without cutting, as long as you are supervising.
- If the cutting action is physically hard work for the child, allow them to try with looped 'easi grip' scissors or spring loaded scissors.
- Show the child how to support the paper with the other hand. Help them turn the paper initially.

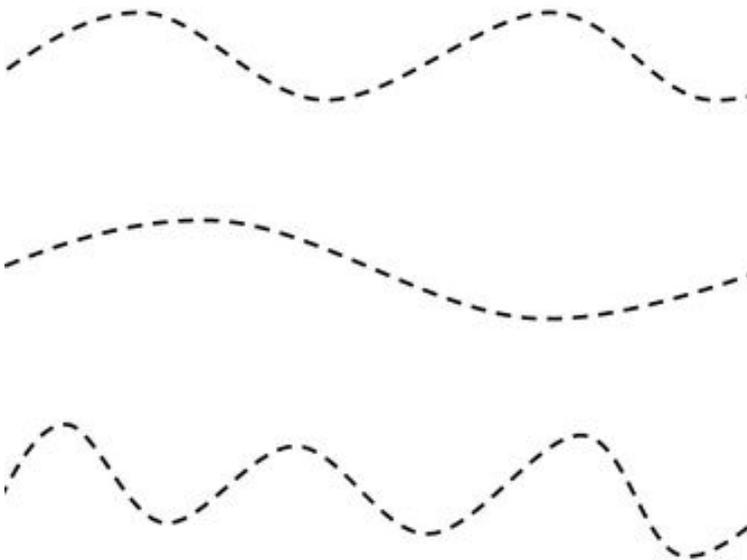
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- Remind a child who is impulsive or has poor body sense/sense of space: '-Are you watching?' 'Look at where your fingers are' 'Go slowly,' 'not too close,' 'Careful,' 'the scissors are sharp'. Repeat. One to one supervision may be required for safety
- Roll play-doh into a sausage shape, encourage child to hold play-doh in non-dominant hand and use scissors to cut into smaller pieces.
- Try simple tasks first, then work upwards: - e.g. 1. Making a cut in a piece of paper, 2. Snipping, 3. Cutting into random pieces, 4. Straight line etc.
- Do the first parts for the child, then let them finish it off. Gradually allow them to do a step more until they can succeed independently.
- If starting to cut, cutting in the right direction or finishing is difficult, draw a green spot for 'go' and a red spot for 'stop'. Draw arrows around the outline to show which way to cut.
- Practice scissor skills during fun activities like arts and crafts



Name _____
Scissor Skills Worksheet
Practice Cutting Lines

Practice your scissor skills but cutting the curved lines below.



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Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Fine Motor and Hand Strength

Developing fine motor abilities and hand strength will support the child in mastering everyday tasks such as dressing, handwriting and cutlery use independently.

Strategies to support the child in developing this skill



Hand strength-

- Playdough / plastacine / putty / bluetac / baking dough activities including rolling a sausage shape and pinching off pieces, rolling balls, making a playdough 'nest' rolling balls for eggs, rolling back into a 'lump' when finished
- Scrunching paper- Scrunch up 2 pieces of scrap paper using one hand for each piece, using only their hands then 'flick' the balls to a marked area or bin
- Pinching pegs- Placing pegs around the circumference of a circular object e.g. tin then removing them. Ask them to try using their thumb and a different finger each time. Ask them to help unpegging or pegging laundry
- Elastic stretch- Ask the child to stretch an elastic band or hair bobble over their hand as far as possible. Get them to try this over their thumb and a different finger each time
- Squeeze toys- Offer different varieties of toys/games that require squeezing e.g. stress balls, toys that light up when squeezed

Pinch strength-

- Play finger games such as incy wincy spider
- Use tweezers to pick up small beads or toys and put them into a container
- Remove coins from a purse one at a time
- Tear up coloured paper for pasting or collage activities
- Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards
- Building and then pulling apart pieces with duplo and lego. Undo and do up nuts and bolts
- Use stickers or sticky tape to stick things down
- Water plants with a spray bottle; squirt a water pistol at a target

Wrist strength-

- Encourage writing, as much as possible, on a vertical surface as this can help your child to achieve a good wrist position. (Use an easel, blackboard, or tape some paper to a wall).

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- Encourage your child to do activities vertically. For example, placing stickers on a window or a piece of paper taped to the wall, playing Connect 4 or threading activities
- Rolling and kneading play dough
- Wrist lifts – place your child's arm on the table and hold his arm. Encourage them to make a fist and bend the wrist back as far as possible

Pincer grip - Practice picking tiny objects (the size of a raisin) with their index finger and thumb

- Provide only one or two tiny things for them to pick up at a time rather than several. They are more likely to use their whole hand instead if there are several things
- Pinch and pull play dough with their thumb and index finger
- Place tiny objects in a section of an empty egg carton or egg cup for your child to pick up e.g. dry cereal hoops, raisins, cubes of cheese or dry pasta
- Let your child play with cooked spaghetti strings or pasta with their fingers on a table or tray

Tripod grip- This is a more mature grasp because it enables the child to pick up small things with their fingers without needing their palm for support, and their thumb begins to move in opposition to their fingers

- Give the child lots of opportunities to grasp objects which are about an inch wide such as small blocks, chunky pegs, empty cotton reels, finger foods
- Let the child pick up objects from small cup. They will have to grasp without holding things against their palm, as they will not be able to fit their whole hand into the container
- Put some cotton reels into sand or play dough so that the child needs to use their thumb and first two fingers to pull them out
- Choose objects carefully for the child to hold, too thin and they will use a palmer grasp (in the palm of the hand), too small and they will try to use a pincer grasp (between thumb and index finger).

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Hand-eye co-ordination- This involves the ability to use the hands and eyes together during an activity

- Dot to dot
- Tracing
- Colouring in pictures or shapes without going over the lines
- Bat and ball games
- Throwing and catching e.g. with a ball or beanbag. When throwing, aim for a target, e.g. into a cardboard box or a hoop.
- Playing skittles
- Threading beads onto a string - use large and small beads or even buttons.
- Hammer and nail toys
- Water control - carrying and pouring of water from a jug into containers to specified levels
- Tracing with a finger along lines, shapes and letters
- Shape sorters - Pop up men (or other toys where an object has to be placed into a base)
- Tower building, with bricks, pegs etc
- Posting - objects through small holes e.g. money box

Bilateral co-ordination - Bilateral Integration is the ability to use both sides of the body together, or both hands together in co-ordination with each other, to effectively complete an activity. This is important for skills such as using a knife and fork, managing buttons and using scissors.

- Threading
- Cutting
- Link-up Toys – Construction such as lego or magnetic blocks, pop-and-lock animals etc
- Wind-up Toys
- Practicing fastening and unfastening zips and buttons
- Playdough/baking e.g. practice rolling with two hands
- Clapping Games – clapping to music, popping bubbles in the air with both hands

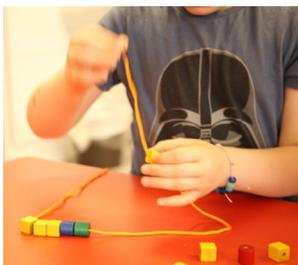
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Larger Bilateral Movements

- Simon Says - using left and right hands, arms, feet and legs
- Jumping games - onto the mat, in the hoop, through a ladder drawn with chalk
- Dancing with a few selected simple steps or movements
- Obstacle courses to allow:- propelling self with arms and legs, commando crawling, crawling, balancing on one foot, hopping, skipping
- Marching with arms swinging alternately
- 'Twister' activity or similar game
- Ball games-rolling, throwing/catching, kicking, using targets/goals
- Swimming
- Learning to ride bike - initially with stabilizers
- Musical instruments-played with two hands, then each hand in turn

Hand dominance

- Offer the child toys, food or feeding utensils directly in front of them so that the child chooses which hand to use
- Place small toys to either side of the child with a bowl or tub placed in front of them. Encourage them pick up the toy and then put it in the container, see which hands they tend to use
- Let the child play with large toys which need two hands to hold e.g. a large ball, a big doll, a book. See which hand they tend to release the object with
- Ask the child to pass their empty bowl or cup after a meal or the towel after a bath and note which hand they tend to use
- Encourage the child to play with toys which require pulling or pushing a ball or toy cars, pulling a toy on a string



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In-hand manipulation- In hand manipulation involves moving an object within one hand. The fingers and thumb are used to best position the object for the activity.

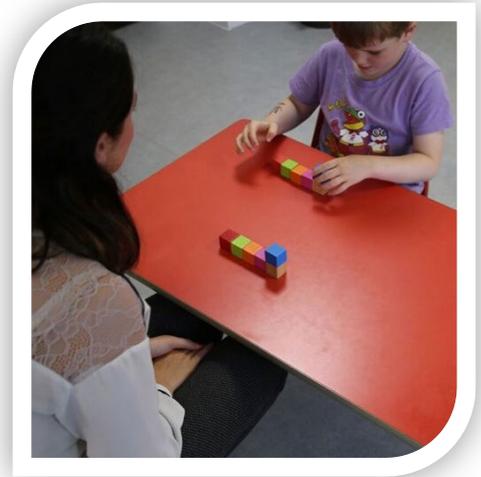
- In these activities encourage the child not to use their other hand, chest or the table to help:
 - Get the child to hold one hand behind their back and ask them to draw with crayons or pens with the other hand. They will need to rotate their pen when they pick it up from the table in order to draw with it
 - Jigsaws with small knobs on each piece
 - Posting toys and moneyboxes (vary the position of the slot)
 - Play *Connect 4*, however, ask the child to pick up 3 counters one at a time and hold them in their hand. When it is the child's turn, ask them to move one counter back to their fingertips and place it into the frame
 - Encourage the child to wet one hand and then place the hand in a bowl of rice. Encourage them to remove the rice from their hand, just using the hand with the rice on it
 - Provide the child with a pencil with a rubber on the end. Ask them to draw a small circle with the pencil and to then turn the pencil around and shuffle his fingers down the pencil to the correct position to be able to rub the circle back out
 - Place some coloured pencils in front of the child. Ask the child to pick up a pencil and write the first letter of their name. Repeat using a different coloured pencil for each letter of the child's name
 - Encourage the child to hold a dice between the tips of their fingers and thumb and turn it around and over to find "the number ...6" choose different numbers

Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Visual Perception

Visual perception allows a person to process visual stimuli in order to identify what we see and understand what we are seeing. Visual perception helps to identify an object correctly including orientation, size, background and the object in relation to others.

Information received during visual perception is what is needed to successfully plan movements, for example to hit a ball, visual perception determines the speed of a ball, its direction in space and how this relates to the position of the child's arm and the applied force needed to move hands through space to successfully catch the ball. Visual perceptual skills are broken down below:



Visual Discrimination: Children with problems in this area may have difficulty matching shapes in pictures and puzzles, and at a later stage, in discriminating between letters/words which look similar

Visual memory: Children with problems in this area may have difficulty learning colours, shapes, letters, numerals; copying (especially from the blackboard); locating objects in the everyday environment

Visual sequential memory: Children with problems in this area may have difficulty with remembering sequences of forms, such as letters and numbers, after seeing them

Visual spatial relationships: Children with problems in this area may have problems differentiating objects which differ because of their direction in space; have difficulty planning actions in relation to surrounding objects; with catching a ball; reverse letters/numerals; become confused regarding the sequence of letters or numbers; be unable to space letters/words correctly when writing

Visual closure: with problems in this area may have difficulty recognising objects which are incompletely visible, and with recognising words without orientating to each individual letter

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Strategies to support the child in developing this skill

Visual and spatial perception games and activities;

- Dominoes- Different sets match characteristics such as colour, design, size and shape.
- Jig-saws- following picture on box
- Finding hidden objects in pictures in activity books such as “Where’s Wally”
- Letter and word hunts. See how many of a particular letter or word the child can underline on a page in a set time.
- Copying designs, e.g. make a design on pegboard, cover it, get the child to reproduce it
- Make a design with matchsticks and coins. Cover it, ask the child to reproduce it.
- Make patterns with stamps and ink pad for the child to reproduce from memory Start with simple patterns, gradually make more difficult
- Noughts and crosses. Partially complete a noughts and crosses game on a piece of paper, cover and ask the child to reproduce on another piece of paper.
- Make a design by placing matchsticks and coins in a row. Cover it, get the child to reproduce it
- Using cards from games such as ‘memory’, ‘snap’, which have pairs of cards on the table. Cover the sequence, ask the child to reproduce it
- Games requiring distance to be judged, e.g. skittles, target games, catching games.
- Action songs requiring body parts to be moved in certain directions e.g. Hockey cokey
- Construction activities requiring the child to follow a plan or picture, or to copy what someone else has built. E.g. Lego, other construction toys; simple model building
- ‘Snap’
- What’s missing’ pictures which require careful observation of detail
- Finding hidden objects in pictures in activity books

Visual Perception techniques and compensatory strategies for school

Equipment-

- Slopping board- to bring work closer to visual field
- Wide ruled paper- to help with letter formation and sizing

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- Darken or highlighted margins on paper
- Coloured glue sticks

Teaching Techniques-

- Given both written and verbal instructions
- Describe visual presentations out loud
- Provide student with a hand-out of the class work
- Allow time to summarize each section
- Include simple diagrams or pictures to break up written directions
- Allow time for the student to ask questions
- Use visual clues
- Directional arrows
- Eliminate clutter
- Eliminate visual distractions
- Position desk away from distractions
- Keep worksheets clear and simple
- Break tasks down into small steps

Occupational Therapy Advice Sheet

Improving Attention & Concentration

Effective attention is what allows us to screen out irrelevant stimulation in order to focus on the information that is important in the moment.

This also means that we are able to sustain attention which then allows us to engage in a task for long enough to repeatedly practice it.

Repeated practice is crucial for skill development. Difficulties in maintaining attention can be due to a variety of factors including; environment, self-regulation, sensory difficulties and motivation.



Strategies to support the child in developing this skill

- Always say how long the activity will last for. This allows children to know what is expected of them and for how long they need to maintain it for
- Encourage 'looking and listening' or 'watching' before and during the giving of instructions. Use short phrases and key words. Avoid including too much information
- Try using visual prompts such as written words, symbols, pictures and photographs
- Use a visual cue to assist with time expectations e.g. the time on a clock, when a bell rings, egg timers and sand timers etc
- Work for smaller periods of time before being able to move or change the task slightly. E.g. collect a book, change from writing to computer work
- Give one activity at a time and put the other activities away out of sight
- Use a reward system to praise good work and periods of attention. Set achievable and realistic goals
- Encourage sitting in the least distractible part of the room, e.g. away from doors and windows
- When in a classroom, the child's table and chair should be as close to the teacher as possible (at the front) to avoid distraction
- When sitting on the floor in a group in front of the teacher, the child needs to be seated close to the teacher where they can see visual aids and listen to the teacher's voice
- When at a table, encourage sitting on a chair tucked in close to the table which allows the child to sit with their feet flat on the floor, knees and hips at ninety degrees with elbows resting on the table

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- Always encourage asking for help when needed but where appropriate, putting hand up rather than using 'attention-seeking' behaviour
- Be direct and clear with instruction - "I'd like you to sit here" rather than: - 'find somewhere to sit and get your books out, so that you can get on with your work quickly...'
- Use the word 'stop' rather than 'No.'
- When speaking, allow enough time for the child to respond. Try not to repeat the question without first giving them this time to answer.
- Try to put instructions in order when they're given. E.g. 'Have a drink, then wash your cup', instead of 'Wash your cup after you have had your drink'.
- Make a visual timetable chart for the classroom to include pictures and words make the timetable clear and uncluttered
- Use body language, which does not distract/confuse the child so that they can listen to what you are saying to them
- Regular but short movement breaks will support the child to stay regulated and maintain attention e.g. 5 minutes of standing body stretches for every 1 hour of expected concentration

What I Need to Begin my Work

-  I need a pencil.
-  I need a book, or paper.
-  I need space.
-  I need a clear idea of what I am doing.
-  I need to know how much time I have.

