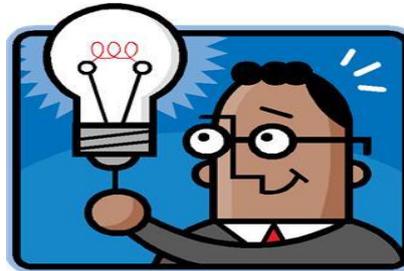


ISCAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE
PROMOTING ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION



Attention is the cognitive process of selectively concentrating on one aspect of the environment while ignoring other things.

Concentration has been defined as "the ability to direct one's thinking in whatever direction one would intend".

We use our attention and concentration skills every day, often with little effort and without really noticing them. These skills help us to select and focus on what is important (e.g. what the teacher is saying), ignore irrelevant or distracting things that we don't need to pay attention to (e.g. what is happening outside the classroom window), and maintain or sustain our effort or attention over time (e.g. concentrate for the whole period). Sometimes we need to pay attention to two or more important things at the one time, and may need to switch back and forth between activities quickly (e.g. copy work from the board whilst the teacher goes through the information and explains it).

This guidance may benefit children who have been identified as having difficulty with maintaining attention and concentration. There are many causes for this. They may have a specific attention disorder (e.g. Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), Sensory Modulation difficulties, visual perceptual difficulties, etc. Other children may not understand the information presented because of a learning/intellectual difficulty as the information may not have meaning for them. They may also have a language difficulty and cannot understand complex verbal information or they may have a memory difficulty and cannot store and hold onto information. Other factors such as anxiety, stress, or fear of failure can also play a role. A child may have a combination of any of these problems.

The 'state of alertness' of the nervous system varies among and within individuals at different times and under different conditions/environments.

Some children may have difficulties filtering out non relevant sensory information. Others may constantly seek or avoid different sensory input to try and regulate their state of alertness. This can result in them being distractible, excitable, or in an over active state as they sit in the classroom. Other children may seem withdrawn from an activity. Children who have attention difficulties immediately compromise their ability to learn, as they are not focused on the information presented to them.

Examples of difficulties with attention & concentration:

- Poor persistence in activities and problems staying on task independently
- Unable to focus in a busy environment
- Being easily distracted, for example by other children, nearby activity or objects
- Becoming easily overwhelmed by large amounts of information or stimulation
- Difficulty selecting relevant information from a large amount of information, or from a cluttered, full page
- Difficulty following instructions
- Difficulties coping with competing demands or multiple activities
- Difficulties adapting to change and moving between different tasks
- Inability to sit still, being restless and fidgety
- Talking in class, interrupting others, and changing the subject

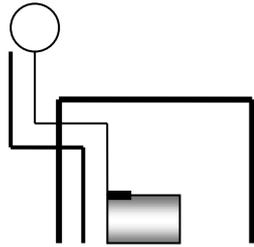
The following list of strategies includes activities and resources that may compensate for any sensory processing issues and help to promote attention and engagement in everyday activities. They are given as suggestions to try and choose from, as felt appropriate by parents and class teachers. As children are all different, it will be necessary to see what works best for your child.

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE ATTENTION/CONCENTRATION

Seating and positioning

- The child should sit with his/her feet flat onto the floor or alternatively use a footrest if the child is unable to reach the floor. The child's hips, knees and ankle joints should be at a 90° angle. Encouraging this position will ensure a good postural background upon which to base fine motor skills.
- The table height should be at elbow level so the forearms rest comfortably on the surface.
- The child's hips should be at the back of the chair and the chair tucked in under the table.

- If the seat depth is too great a cushion placed at the back of the seat may help.



- For some children and depending on the activity, it may be preferable to try alternative positions to help them focus e.g. standing, lying on their tummy, sitting on a gym ball. (Back in Action (www.backinaction.co.uk) sells a gym ball with a "seat frame" which is safe to use in the classroom).



The 'Sitness' range is a great alternative to the everyday chair. It consists of a gym ball on a frame covered in hard wearing mesh fabric. It reduces your balance encouraging movement while sitting, and in turn strengthening your core muscles.

- Position the child in the least distracting area of the classroom i.e. away from windows/doors/classroom corridors or position them in front of the teacher (make sure the child does not perceive this as a punishment) or with children who will be good role models.
- Simplify and reduce material on worksheets, and the blackboard
- Use soft music, research has shown that soft music in the background may help some children organise, calm and attend in the classroom, for example, Albinoni's Adagio in G minor (pleasant, calming music).
- Try to avoid the classroom being over stimulating. Visual stimuli (e.g. busy wall displays) may easily overwhelm the child. Reduce all visual, auditory and social stimulation to a level which is appropriate to the child, e.g. dimmable lights, quiet room etc. If it is not possible to achieve this, a quiet area will help the child focus. You can also use a **privacy board** to decrease visual distraction when doing individual work.



- **Diminish background noise:** the child may find it easier to focus if s/he is allowed to wear earplugs or headphones to block out unwanted noise.



Available from ebay.co.uk



Available from: kidstravelclub.co.uk

Sensory modulation techniques

Fidget toys - The child may listen and attend more easily if s/he is permitted to fiddle with an acceptable object. This helps him/her regulate his/her body's need for tactile input. You can use a stress ball, a balloon filled with flour, fidget pencil, etc (Available from Education Resources).



Cushions that allow movement - Some children use 'fidgeting' and rocking movements as a means to organise their attention. It is "positive" to the child, do not stop them or draw too much attention to these movements. Discuss with the child's Occupational Therapist to work out alternative strategies. The child may benefit from sitting on a "Move and Sit" wedge or "sissel sitfit" cushion which allows them to satisfy their nervous systems need for movement. This will help them to be able to organise their thoughts more easily. These are available online @ www.backinaction.co.uk www.ldalearning.com



Sissel sitfit



Move and sit

Weighted Equipment - Use of a weighted lap- pad can be used as a self-regulating tool to calm and organise the nervous system as it provides deep pressure. It is important to be aware of safe use of weighted equipment and follow manufacturer's guidelines.

Different items can be found online @ www.rompa.com



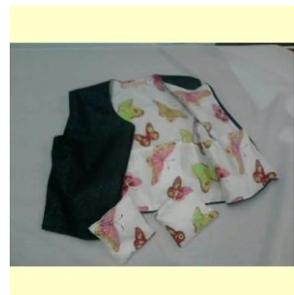
Weighted Lap pads (not suitable for children under age of 3 years)



Weighted Vests and Hoodies



Weighted vests are used as a means of applying deep pressure, which tends to decrease purposeless hyperactivity and increases functional attention to tasks. Weighted vests should be 10% of the total body weight for efficacy. They should be worn for at least 20 minutes and up to 2 hours is the typically recommended duration needed for effective sensory motor response. Available from sensorydirect.com



Oral Motor Stimulation

The coordination of sucking, swallowing, and breathing is theorized to form a foundation for regulating arousal and developing of postural, oculomotor, and praxis skills.

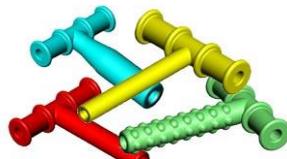
When oral motor stimulation is used to improve arousal and the overall state of the nervous system, intervention is guided and graded. Activities may include:

- **Nutritive substances**, for example,

Biting, crunching, and chewing dried fruit/fresh fruit/ crunching on crisps.



- **Non nutritive objects**, for example



Chewy Tubes available from
Chewlry UK.

Movement Breaks

Allow regular movement breaks as this will help the nervous system to "regulate" itself. Regular opportunities for movement (especially heavy muscle work) will help the child remain more focused - for example: being asked to hand in the registers, wipe the whiteboard clean, hand out the text books or take a note to another class, pushing against the classroom wall, etc. As the effects of this type of sensory input is relatively short lived, these need to be incorporated regularly in to daily routine. The child may benefit from regular changes of activity to re-alert him/herself. These learning breaks will help him/her to improve attention and focus.

Use of instructions (Auditory and Visual)

When giving instructions it is important to remember the following;

- **Make sure the child assumes the necessary attention** and posture before giving out instructions. This does not mean direct eye contact. Eye contact can be “uncomfortable” for some children and should not be forced. You may have to interrupt them as they may find it difficult to listen and do something else at the same time.
- **Provide direct prompts** to return to task and positively reinforce on-task behaviour.
- **Break down instructions.** If the child needs to do a complex/long task, break it down for him/her into smaller steps. The child may have difficulty following open ended instructions. Instead, provide concrete timescales e.g. ‘Do questions 1, 2 and 3 then raise your hand’. Give one instruction at a time to begin with. As the child becomes able to follow one step instructions, go to two-step, then three-step instructions. Provide the child with a written/pictorial cue of these steps and suggest s/he crosses each step off when achieved.

Practical Strategies to assist with Auditory Memory

- **Give one direction at a time.** Sometimes a child who is given a three-part instruction will only act on the first or last command.
- **Use short, simple, one-concept phrases to give directions.** Do not elaborate. Repeat verbal directions slowly, firmly, and clearly.
- **Wait a little longer** than you think is necessary to give the child time to analyse the command and put it into action.
- **Give a visual demonstration or physical assistance.**
- **Reduce auditory distractions.** Be aware of papers shuffling, pencils dropping etc.
- **Schedule classroom activities** with high auditory processing demands at a time when auditory competition outside is at a minimum.
- **Practice verbal direction-following in gross motor games.** Progress from one-step to four-step sequences.

- **Insist that a child does not move until you have finished the directions.** Ask the child to repeat the directions in the proper sequence.
- **Introduce another strategy for asking for help** rather than coming to you immediately or disrupting other children. Try the 2 T's technique. When the child receives their work sheet, they must look at the instructions and see if they can understand what to do. If they do not understand it, they must write a 'T' at the top of their paper. They then look one more time at the instructions, if they still do not understand; they should write another 'T' on their paper. When they have two T's, they can raise their hand. That lets the teacher know it is time to **talk**.

Classroom routine

The following tips are helpful within a classroom setting;

- **Organise activities** in such a way that periods of time sitting are alternated with periods of movement. For younger children it may be possible to 'march' from one activity to another. The rhythmical body motion and input to the feet can be organising.
- **Use a multi sensory approach;** i.e. presenting the same information in different ways, such as pictures, words, videos, multimedia, music, etc. to reinforce learning and keep interest.
- **Because they are repetitive, schedules and routines help children learn classroom activities.** Children are able to predict what will happen next and this helps them feel secure and prepared. Classrooms with consistent schedules and routines facilitate children's understanding of the learning environment and expectations. Children who are familiar with classroom schedules and routines are more likely to be engaged, attentive, and learn new knowledge. Activities that require fairly intense concentration should ideally follow with a PE, break or other games/physical activities.
- **Some children learn more easily by using their vision.** These children may best be able to follow written or pictorial instructions. Visual Timetables enable pupils to understand what they are doing when over a period of time such as the school day. They give structure to the day and can reduce anxiety levels. Symbols are used to represent the tasks, activities or lessons and these are taught to the pupil. They are then displayed to give a visual picture of what is happening. Older students may have them stuck on tables or pinned on a nearby wall.

Visual timetables

Benefits to visual time tables include;

- give pupils structure to the day
- promote independence
- reduce anxiety
- increase confidence
- build upon pupil's strength as a visual learner
- build upon pupil's desire for routine, predictability and organisation
- give permanency



An example of symbols on a board maker available from assistivetechcenter.org

- Use of a visual timer with sand or numbers or a traffic light system can also help to decrease anxiety and help to attend to a task as the child knows how much is expected.



Use the Time Tracker in school to help structure timed tasks and prepare for transitions. It can be used at home to help children prepare for bed/ get ready for school etc. and mark play date times. Easy to use volume controls make this item practical for individual or class wide use. Available from Learning Resources.

Written information

When presenting written information it is important to remember the following;

- Use a highlighter for important information to stand out on a page.
- Use double spacing / larger font size to draw attention to important information on the page.

- Provide card to cover parts of work sheet or window cut-out to focus on one area of the page.
- If the problem is with the quantity of work, consider making the assignment shorter.
- Modify assignments, so that the child can focus on one task at a time (i.e. maybe each one on different pages).
- Allow the child to dictate work.
- Reduce copying from the board; i.e. provide handouts of work on the board so that they focus only on the work to be done.

Reading

When reading, use a finger or ruler to follow text, placed directly underneath the line of text or window cut-out to focus on one area of the page.