



Helping Your Child Develop His or Her Concentration

Maintaining concentration on activities is an essential part of effective learning and is particularly important for the development of the essential skill needed for independent learning – being able to work quietly on your own. This advice note offers a few suggestions and games to help you help your child develop his or her concentration skills.

A. SOME SIMPLE PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES.

These techniques are simple and straightforward. They can be fun, they can help to develop positive relationship between you and your children. They can help your child see that he or she can do the things they are trying; they can concentrate and it can be very rewarding for them. However, while they are known to be powerful and effective they do not always work for everyone and persevering when they cause upset can be damaging. If you are anxious about your child's progress, you should seek some more help. Your child should always feel confident and relaxed when you are using them.

1. Building Mind-Body Integration

For lots of younger children being able to 'sit still' seems to be an impossibility. This is often because they want to stimulate themselves and the easiest way to do that is by moving, tapping, swinging legs fiddling with things, etc. They are using their body to keep their brains at a heightened level of activity. A simple way to help them to 'learn' a new way of working is to have your child attempt to sit in a chair without moving. Parents should time how long they can manage. Repeated practice, with a positive challenge to improve will lead to improvement. (Positive challenges and timing can make this into a game that all can enjoy.)

At first, your child will possibly try to be very stiff and hold him or herself tightly in place. As you practise, encourage them to relax and concentrate being still. When children have had some practice at Mind-Body Integration and have learned to relax and sit still for a minute or more, Positive Thoughts can be introduced.

2. Positive Thoughts

Positive thoughts are a very powerful tool that we can all use to help us develop psychologically. They can help us overcome our fears and anxieties, they can help us achieve more and they can make us feel generally good about ourselves. There is a simple way that you can use them to help your child build their concentration skills.

We associate things that we do with things that we have done in the past. We remember what happened when we did them and how we felt. In this way, we begin to associate what we do with our feelings and emotions. As a result we all find it easier to do things we enjoy and harder and harder to do the things that we associate with less pleasant or unpleasant outcomes or emotions.

Encourage your child to think about a happy time they have had. Encourage them to remember the events and then to think about how they felt at the time and then afterwards. A good way to start is with an event you have shared, perhaps a time in the park together or on a day out. It does not need to be a big event, in fact short simple things are often best. Regularly talk about it together and slowly get them to think about it quietly themselves. When they have had a little practice and can do this by themselves, encourage them to think about this event when they are sitting still. Very quickly, they will



start to associate sitting still with happy times and good feelings. That will encourage them to sit still more often and for longer periods.

3. Positive Imagery

Using visual imagery can help us all, including children, to improve or learn new skills. Sportsmen often use this technique. For instance, research shows that if a person mentally practices their golf swing, the brain actually records the imaginary trials the same as if they were real trials, which leads to improvement on the golf course. Work with stroke patients, for example has shown that by imagining physical actions that they have 'lost', like raising their arm, can help them 'learn again' and learn to do it again.

Children can imagine that they are paying attention in class or dealing with a difficult situation. They can imagine sitting still on the floor at carpet-time and listening to the teacher. They can imagine sitting down and writing a story. You and your child can be creative together thinking of where this might help.

B. GAMES AND THINGS TO DO

The following are a few ideas of games and activities that can help your child concentrate. There are lots more like them and you probably do some of them already.

1. Memory and Concentration Games

There are lots of these games. Memory games include:

- I packed my bag (repeating things in the bag and adding another one each time)
- Pelamanism (finding pairs of cards from an upturned pack)
- Missing Objects (putting a few objects on a tray, covering it and taking one away and the child has to say what is missing)
- Copy It (arrange counters or coins in a pattern remove it and the child has to repeat it. With younger children start with copying the array without removing it)
- Copying rhythms tapped out.

There are also computer games available for improving concentration and memory.

2. Picture Games

Good things to use here are 'Spot the Difference' pictures, searching pictures for small details (e.g. Where's Wally?) and finding things that are wrong in pictures. These games encourage systematic searching and concentrating on detail.

3. Word Searches, Crosswords,

These improve attention for words and patterns.

4. Simon Says

Games like Simon Says are great for helping children concentrate and focus on the full extent of an instruction and to look for key words in sentences.

But first a warning! The activities suggested should be used as fun and be enjoyable for your child. If you make too great a demand on him or her, or he or she finds them unpleasant, they will have a negative effect and neither of you will have a pleasant time.

And the good news is! They are fun things to do and can help to build positive relationships. They can be very effective 'quality time'. The more fun you make them the better they work. You can help your child to learn to concentrate.

These suggestions are activities that parents can use with their own children. They will help develop their ability but will not on their own resolve serious symptoms for a child. In such cases parents should always seek professional advice and support.