

the school years toolkit

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Maximising attention

Some children have difficulty focusing at home and school, making it much harder for them to learn. This can be seen in different ways.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and not seen improvement after four months, please contact CYPIT.

What you may see

- Lots of incessant talking.
- Lots of movement or fidgeting.
- Sluggish or slumping in their chair.

Children may become more attentive and focused when changes in their environment and certain resistive-type activities are adopted.

We, as adults, use various strategies to stay focused at meetings such as drinking, fidgeting with pens and stretching.

Strategies and Advice

Movement Stimulation:

Encourage "movement breaks" before and between desk activities, or at any time the child appears lethargic or fidgety, for example:

- Marching on the spot
- Arm windmills
- Jumping Jacks
- Jumping up and down
- Chair push-ups
- Regular changes of position eg lying on tummy, propping on elbows, standing
- Have younger children "march" from one activity to another. The rhythmical body motion and input to the feet can help to be organising
- Incorporate errands into the child's day, for example: returning the register, taking messages to another part of the school, chair monitor, door monitor, carrying heavy books etc. This will also provide opportunities for praise and increase self-confidence.

Section 5 **advice** sheets

General Organising Activities:

- Place your hands on the child's shoulders or head with safe, firm pressure as this can help them slow down.
- Input to the mouth through drinking or eating chewy or crunchy foods helps with focus and organisation. Although food is not widely promoted during class time, certain snacks may help a child be calm and focused on their schoolwork.
- Consider the following chewy treats:
 - Dried fruits (raisins, apple slices, banana chips).
 - Crunchy snacks (raw vegetables, apple slices, pretzels, rice cakes).
 - Sugar free chewing gum for older children
 - Water bottles – sucking through a straw or a water bottle with a sports top may be quite calming. The force required to suck the water up can be organising to the sensori-motor system.
- Have younger children try to “hold the walls up” or “push the walls down”. Teach older children to do push-ups with their hands in their seats.
- People often “fiddle” with small objects such as erasers or paper clips as a way to maintain attention. If it is not interfering with classroom learning, allow “fiddle” objects during listening activities.

Environmental Adaptations:

- Lighting – is there enough natural light?
- Displays – bright, reflective colours can be too distracting.
- Clutter – is the table/desk as clear as possible?
- Room temperature – is it too hot or cold? Is there enough fresh air circulating?
- White/black board – to be kept clean when not in use to reduce distraction.
- Noise – keep it to a minimum. Sometimes background music can be helpful.
- Prompts – remind the child to maintain eye contact with the person they are talking or listening to.
- Use of voice either quiet/varying the tone/enthusiastic.

Suggested Resources

Line Tracker - Taskmaster Ltd Morris Road, Leicester, LE2 6BR

Telephone: 0116 270 4286

www.taskmasteronline.co.uk

Reading Window – LDA Pintail Close, Victoria Business Park, Nottingham NG4 2SG

Telephone: 0845 120 4776

www.ldalearning.com

Fidget Items - Hawkins Bazaar The Old Aerodrome, Worlingham, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 7SP

Section 5 **advice** sheets

Telephone: 0870 429 4000

www.hawkin.com

The Happy Puzzle Company

PO Box 586, Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3XY

Telephone: 0844 848 2820

www.happypuzzle.co.uk

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www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/cypittoolkits