

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



Attention / Concentration

Attention and Concentration is important for children's development and learning of skills. Children who have trouble concentrating often are easily distracted and have difficulty taking in auditory and visual information. This makes it difficult for them to focus on a task long enough to build their skills. An inability to concentrate can significantly impact on a child's learning. **However, it is important to have realistic expectations of how long we expect a child to concentrate for.**

How long should my child be able to concentrate?

Preschool children can typically attend to one activity that is of interest to them for around 8 to 10 minutes; and should generally be able to filter out small distractions going on around them. Your child may only be able to attend to a specific task they have been asked to complete for 4 to 8 minutes; particularly if it's not interesting to them or if there is a part of the task that is difficult.

How will I know if my child is having difficulty with their attention / concentration?

Your child may demonstrate some of the following behaviours:

- An inability to sit still (may appear 'wiggly')
- Is easily distracted (this includes 'day dreaming')
- Has problems following instructions, and doesn't seem to be listening when spoken to directly
- Has problems organising their belongings – they may not remember where they put their hat, or their drink bottle
- Has difficulty completing tasks
- Is experiencing learning difficulties
- Demonstrates some behavioural difficulties such as aggression, moodiness or irritability
- Experiences friendship issues, such as having difficulty making and keeping friends
- Clumsiness, or poor gross motor skills, such as running or jumping.
- The Educator may comment on your child's inability to complete tasks, and focus at mat times
- The child has not shown improvements in their ability to sustain attention, remember instructions and follow through on assigned tasks

Where to start?

If you are concerned about your child's inability to maintain attention or concentrate on a task, the first place to start is to consult your GP or Maternal and Child Health Nurse. You will then be able to discuss your concerns, and

the GP or Maternal and Child Health Nurse will assist you in determining what to do next. They may recommend referring your child to a paediatrician. A paediatrician will determine if the difficulty is purely an attention and concentration issue, or alternatively, if it is a symptom of another issue, such as a learning difficulty.

What else could contribute to an inability to concentrate or maintain attention?

- A lack of sleep or a poor routine – see link below
- A diet high in sugar and fat, thereby lacking the nutritional value to assist concentration
- Excessive screen-time, especially prior to going to bed – television, ipads, tablets, mobile phones, computer games – see link below
- Difficulties at home, such as a recent separation of parents, chronic illness of a family member or a family trauma

What can I do to help my child improve their concentration and attention?

- Make eye contact with your child, and get down to their level when giving instructions
- Start slow, and extend when the child can focus for that length of time e.g. start with how long the child CAN concentrate for
- Aim for success – choose activities that you know your child can complete to experience success
- Give only one instruction at a time and ensure this is followed through
- Always give brief, simple instructions it may be helpful to demonstrate the task first or provide a visual prompt.
- Praise your child for finishing and offer encouragement
- Sit with your child to model concentration, and support your child if help is required
- Use timers to increase tolerance for structured activities e.g. sand timer or a timer app
- Decrease distractions as much as possible - for example, where possible restrict the size of the environment e.g. set up activity facing a wall, with bookshelf blocking the rest of the room
- Use key words to improve listening e.g. 'look', 'focus', 'listen'
- Adjust your expectations, present one activity at a time with breaks in between

What activities can I do with my child to improve their concentration?

- What's missing? Game – Lay out 2 or 3 items out for child to look at, child closes eyes and you remove an item, the child then guesses 'What's missing?'
- Memory Games – lay pairs of cards out and take it in turns turning cards over to find pairs
- Basic Board Games e.g. Snakes and Ladders
- 'Questions' is a fun game for 3- and 4-year-olds that helps them focus on one item as they learn about it. To play - an item is placed in front of the child. The child is then allowed to look at it briefly. You then ask the child a series of questions one after the other about the item e.g. the item may be a teddy bear, a toy etc.
- Listening Games – Say three words, and pick the odd one out or 'Simon Says' with 2 or 3 instructions' – start with one and build up, or 'Freeze'
- Copy action rhymes – 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star', 'Incy Wincy Spider', 'A Sailor went to Sea'
- Books with actions required – such as flap books or 'pull the arrow' or 'Where's Wally'

Additional Information:

Sleep routine - http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/good_sleep_habits_tips.html/context/617

Limit TV watching - http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/tv_preschoolers.html

<https://www.hincksdellcrest.org/ABC/Teacher-Resource/The-Child-with-Attention-Problems/The-Inattentive-Child.aspx>