

STAYING ALERT IN THE CLASSROOM

Increasing attention plays an important role in a child's success in the classroom. Attention allows children to "tune out" unrelated information, background noise and visual distractions. By doing this children are able to concentrate and focus on the important information being given by teachers. The overall goal is to make all learning experiences full of sensory information so that there are maximum opportunities to notice and respond to the cues in the environment, as well as teach a child to pay attention.



Increasing Attention

Hints and Tips

- Structure the classroom effectively; arrange desks in a way that allows all students to equally be able to focus on the teacher
- Go for a walk before class begins (Or complete a Sensory Circuit)
- Sitting students with reduced concentration skills near the front of the class helps to promote engagement and attention
- Call the child to get their attention before giving them an instruction.
- Use animated (or sing song) tone of voice to make it more alerting/interesting when explaining something.
- Ask the child to repeat instructions back to you to ensure they have been paying attention
- Make the activity 'alerting', interesting and engaging e.g. use of bright colours, visual and tactile stimulus etc.
- Research shows that the more senses used during a learning experience the more likely the child will retain the information therefore provide learning in a multi-sensory manner- use of smells, sounds, visuals etc.

- Provide opportunities for movement and change to alert the senses. Change position in class, i.e. move to a different chair, or change body position i.e. sitting at table, lying on tummy on floor, sitting on carpet. A child may require direction to move or change position as they may not realise they need to move or seek this for themselves.



- Remind children to take off their jumper in a warm classroom, and utilise opportunities for fresh air
- Provide contrast between items in the environment to make it obvious to see. Therefore reduce clutter and make things stand out.
- Provide activities to prepare for task (e.g. handwriting warm ups / play dough/ fine motor skills activities) before writing and break tasks up with activity in between to keep it interesting and less predictable.

- Fidget tools may help some children by keeping their hands busy while they are listening e.g. stress ball, koosh ball, rubber band. Fidget tools can be used on a key ring to make them more discreet. These should only be given at specific times though and agreed with the teacher and the child.



- Be mindful of distracting noises such as overhead lightning, clocks ticking, fans, and corridor or hall noises.
- Develop a secret signal between you and the child, showing them that you want them to concentrate on their work, and another one so that they can ask for help.

You may be surprised at the different ways you can alter a person’s “arousal” level (e.g. his concentration/relaxation/activity levels).

Certain activities or environmental stimuli can be used to stimulate your child and improve his concentration; other strategies can be used to calm him down. The following table may give you some ideas – chose ones to try which are appropriate given your child’s age and needs.

Calming	Alerting
Use of soft, dim lights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of bright lights. • Use of a torch to draw attention to a particular thing (e.g. on the blackboard).
Use of a soft, slow, monotone voice. <input type="checkbox"/> Singing voice.	Varying the pitch, speed, volume and intonation of your voice. Some children respond to being given a “fidget” tool e.g. a (quiet) squeezey toy, “koosh ball”.
Sitting in a small, enclosed space e.g. tent, or for young children, inside a large box, being surrounded by cushions.	Larger, open spaces, with lots of different colours/objects.

Self-regulating techniques that can be both calming and alerting in the classroom:

- Air filled cushion, therapy ball to sit on, rocking chair, or bean bag.
- Wall pushes, hands on head and push down, or chair press ups.
- Weighted products such as neck wraps, lap pads etc.
- Frequent movement breaks, including handing out books, running errands or messages to other classrooms, brain gym activities.
- Blowing bubbles.
- Chewing or sucking on [Chewellery](#).



- Squeeze a stress ball.