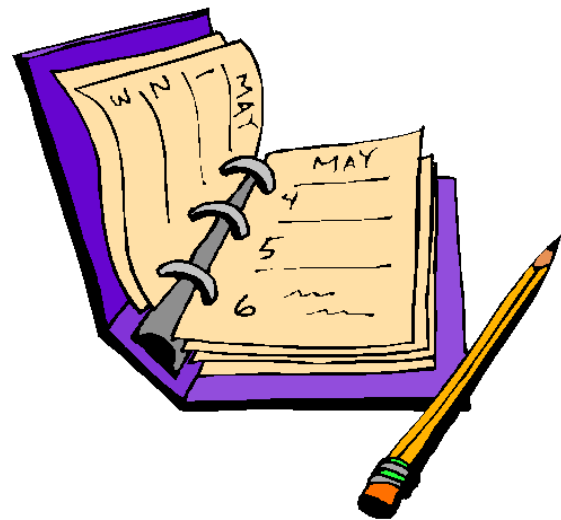


# Occupational Therapy Strategies

## Attention, Concentration & Organisational Skills

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## **IMPROVING A YOUNG PERSONS ATTENTION, CONCENTRATION AND ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS**

Everybody needs to be able to focus and concentrate in order to complete tasks. The length of time for which we are able to do this depends on age, our needs and the activity we are doing. There are many things you can try at home and/or school to help a young person to develop their concentration. Here are some ideas to try:

### **Make Sure Their Basic Needs Are Met**

- A good bedtime routine can help a young person to achieve a decent amount of good quality sleep every night.
- Reduce the young person's sugar intake.
- Increase the young person's protein intake (this could be from meat, fish, nuts, eggs) as this will stimulate levels of dopamine, a hormone which makes concentration easier.
- Support the young person to enjoy daily physical activity.

### **Planning the Activity**

- Firstly, decide how long the young person is able to focus upon the task.
- Involve the young person in planning the session to improve motivation and participation - *It is also worth reminding the young person that we all have to complete tasks that are tedious and the sooner we tackle them, the sooner we can move onto another task!*
- If the task is larger – break it down into bite-size pieces, to be tackled one bit at a time.
- Write down the steps.
- Ask the young person questions such as, “what do we need to do first?” “What materials do we need?” “What would happen if...?”
- Using the concepts “first” and “then” help the young person know what order they need to complete the command (e.g. "First get your jacket, and then put on your shoes").
- Incorporate movement breaks/rest breaks into the session.

### **Remove Distractions and Set the Mood for Concentration**

- Turn off electrical items which could be distracting such as television/ tablets/ phones (overuse of electronic devices can actually reduce a young person's ability to concentrate, so make sure you are limiting screen time to a reasonable amount).
- Avoid completing tasks in a cluttered environment.
- When completing a task, limit the materials to what the young person actually needs, e.g. one or two books at a time.
- Find out what helps the young person concentrate, for example calming music, softer lightening or a very quiet environment.
- The use of a reading window may help to filter out unnecessary information.

### **Activity Modification**

- Challenge the young person in a positive way to complete more repetitions of a task.
- Use a timer to give the young person readable targets. Start with short time intervals and gradually increase the time intervals as the young person's concentration improves.
- Use the visual symbol of the traffic light to stop and plan activities. "red" is for "stop", amber is for "think and plan" and green is for "do". It may be useful to put this on a card in your diary etc. as a visual reminder.
- Be sensitive to the young person's fatigue level and ensure the young person has 'down time' every day to recharge their batteries.

### **Verbalisation and Attention**

- Adult voice can be used to elicit attention: a change in your tone of voice can help to gain the child's attention.
- Be careful not to talk too much when a child is trying to concentrate and ensure your language is simple and clear.
- Focus on positive behaviour, e.g. say "Look at the paper" rather than "Don't look over there".
- Focus on effort rather than how much work the young person completes.
- Rules and instructions should be short and clear and wherever possible also presented visually in form of charts, lists, pictures etc.

### **Remembering**

- Use mnemonics to cue recall.
- Complete memory games such as 'I went to the market and I bought' or matching pairs of cards.
- Have the young person repeat directions.
- Use songs, poems and chants to enhance recall.
- Colour code significant details, e.g. use different colour folders or workbooks for different subjects.
- Try making a funny or striking visual image to help retain the information (for example if you need your P.E. kit, money for school trip and packed lunch, imagine a £5 sandwich placed in a trainer).
- Encourage the young person to put an item they need into their schoolbag as soon as they think of it and definitely the night before.
- The young person may forget things e.g. to take their reading book home and bring it back to school etc. A check is needed before they leave school or home and gradual encouragement to take this responsibility himself/herself.

### **Physical Activities to help Concentration:**

Regular breaks in activity, especially schoolwork, can help to prolong the amount of time that a child can sit and attend. The following activities can be implemented easily throughout the day and when it is clear that a child needs a movement break.

- Ask the young person to push their hands together in front of their chest for at least 10 seconds.
- Ask the young person to raise both of their hands above their head and stretch.
- Ask the young person to push their down onto the table through arms.

- Ask the young person to put their hands on the chair and attempt to lift their bottom off the seat by pushing through their arms.
- Ask the young person to squeeze their hands into a fist and release (repeat five times).
- Ask the young person to shake out their hands and arms for 10 seconds at a time.
- Ask the young person to push and pull on a piece of theraband (some young people keep a small piece of theraband in their pocket to push/pull on when required).
- The young person could have a piece of ribbon sewn into their pocket to fidget with.
- The young person could trial using a movement cushion on their chair so they can still move/fidget whilst sitting.
- The young person could use a squishy/stress ball to squeeze and release.
- Having regular movement breaks can aid concentration. These movement breaks could include: going for a walk, running errands for a teacher, spending time jumping on a trampette or bouncing on a gym ball.

**Activities and strategies to improve Sequencing and Organising skills:**

- Support the young person to practice doing things in a specific order by having them follow a cooking recipe or set the table.
- Practice organising skills by supporting the young person to put things in alphabetical order.
- Use of a diary/calendar/timetable to help with organisation.
- Put an item you need into your schoolbag as soon as you think of it and definitely the night before. There is nothing like being in a rush to help you forget something vital.
- Create places for certain items and encourage the young person to put them back in the same place each time.
- It may be helpful to have a checklist by the door so they can have a last minute prompt to check they have got all the items they need for that day, e.g. bag, pencil, dinner money, coat
- Put strategies in place to prevent mislaying important items e.g. attach letters from school into diary.