**Attention and Focus**

Some children struggle to sit still due to difficulties with attention and focus. Some people need to move regularly to maintain their arousal levels and help them to stay focused. Others are easily distracted by their environment or find it hard to supress the urge to fiddle with objects or get up and explore the room. Children will struggle to initiate and/or stay on task when the activity is too difficult, they feel unable to achieve or they do not understand what to do.

For more information on how **sensory processing difficulties** may contribute to a child’s struggling to sit still and maintain focus, please access our **Training Package for Schools**.

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| **Area of Difficulty** | **Strategy** | **Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments.** |
| Child excessively touches objects | Allow access to a box of fidget items e.g. tangle toys, squeeze balls, putty. The child may be more able to attend to the task whilst manipulating these items. Fiddle toys should not be visually distracting.     * <https://www.sensorydirect.com/behaviour/concentration/fidget-toys> * <https://www.griffinot.com/top-five-tips-fidget-toys/> |  |
| Remove all unnecessary materials from the child’s work area. |  |
| Child is distracted by their environment | Consider where the child is positioned in class, aim to move them away from the window and towards the front of the class room/whiteboard. |  |
| Keep the child's desk clutter free. Make sure only relevant information is on the white/chalk board. |  |
| Consider using a pop-up workstation to block out distractions during focused activity.  <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/pop-up-concentration-desk-barrier/1004416.html> |  |
| Child excessively seeks movement  Child is lethargic/ lacks energy and zones out /daydreams | Allow regular movement breaks particularly prior to and after times in which the child needs to concentrate on an activity.   * <https://www.griffinot.com/sensory-movement-breaks-tips-for-success/> * <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5uIZ2KOZZeQDQo_Gsi_qbQ> (Cosmic Yoga movement break) * <https://www.youtube.com/c/GriffinOT/videos> * Children that are lethargic and need ‘waking up’ will need to complete ‘alerting’ activities. Children that are seeking movement and fidgeting will need to complete more ‘organising/calming’ movements. |  |
| **Consider the use of a Move & Sit cushion**  An air-filled cushion creates a moving surface for the child to sit on. The idea is that this movement helps to keep the child alert and therefore helps the child’s attention and focus.  - They can help children who are constantly moving about, fidgeting and rocking in their chair by providing a sense of fidgeting without such noticeable movements.  - They can also help a child who is slumped in their chair and appear to have low energy as it may help them feel more alert.  - Wedge shaped cushions help tip the pelvis and therefore promote a better upright sitting posture.  **Before considering an air-filled cushion, check to see if the child is fidgeting because their feet can’t touch the floor when sitting on a chair. If this is the case then provide a foot box for the child to put their feet on.**  Key points to remember when using air-filled cushions:  - When sitting on the cushion check to see if the child can put their feet on the floor, if they can’t then a foot stool should be used to help keep them stable. If the child is too unstable on the cushion then their fine motor control will be compromised.  - For some children the use of these cushions causes them to fidget more as they have to work harder to maintain a good posture and therefore fatigue. The use of the cushion should be built up over time and used selectively e.g. when sitting and listening not during tasks that require fine motor skills.  - Monitor the child’s response to the cushion. Has using the cushion improved their attention and or focus? If the cushion is not helping then a different strategy should be tried.  - The cushions need to be inflated. However, be careful not to over inflate the cushion. Watch the video by OT Griffin for further advice: <https://youtu.be/IrqnsgDfpYc>  - The child must be sat on the cushion with their bottom back in the chair so that they are sat fully on the cushion.  - Make sure you are using the right sized cushion. The child’s entire bottom and the top of their thighs should be on the cushion. Their thighs should not be bulging over the sides. Don’t just assume a child will need a child’s size  - If the child doesn’t like the lumps on the cushion, it is okay to flip it over and use the smooth side to sit on.  - Air-filled cushions often don’t work well on the classroom floor. If it is decided that the air-filled cushion is the best option, it may be better for the child to sit on their cushion on a chair, instead of sitting on the floor. |  |
| **You may want to consider weighted items to help calm and focus.**  The core idea behind all weighted products is that weight offers proprioceptive feedback which can have a calming effect, helping to improve a child’s attention span and reducing excessive fidgeting. Weighted lap pads and shoulder wraps apply calming deep pressure whilst the user is sitting down.  Please remember that everyone is unique so while some children will find these strategies calming, for others it may not work.  When can they be used?  • To help reduce fidgeting and support self-regulation during carpet time and assembly.  • When needing to focus for a period of time when sitting at the classroom table, during reading time or at the dinner table.  • Not recommended for night time use.  How should they be used?  • Lap pads and shoulder weights can be used for short periods of time throughout the day when the child is expected to sit still.  • Over time the child is likely to get used to the sensation and therefore it will become less effective. Therefore, they should be used for short, focussed periods and not all day.  • It is important that the child has control over when the lap pad is used. A child should never be forced to use the lap pad or shoulder wrap if they do not want to.  • The child should be able to remove the lap pad or shoulder weight by themselves.  • Users should always ensure they follow the manufacturer’s safety guidelines when using a weighted product.  There are a number of online suppliers including:  - <https://www.sensorydirect.com/deep-pressure/lap-shoulder-weights.html>  - <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Lap-Weight-for-sensory-integration/dp/B00GSWT7D0>  - Alternatively, wheat bags can be use  *Weighted Blankets- Please note that this advice sheet is not referring to the use of weight blankets. If you wish to know more about the safe use of weighted blankets please refer to the Royal College of Occupational Therapy Briefing - the safe use of weighted blankets (2011) which is available online.* |  |
| Child doesn’t always pay attention to, or follow instructions | Check that the child has listened to your instructions, and understands what to do, by asking them to repeat the instructions back to you. |  |
| Break down activities into smaller steps. Write down instructions or use simple visual schedules to help prompt. The child can tick the tasks off as they compete them. |  |
| Consider using a ‘Now and Next’ board.  A “Now and Next” board supports a child to understand what will be happening and the order that this will happen. It can help alleviate anxiety and support the child to follow an adult’s agenda rather than their own. It is a useful strategy for home and school, it can be used to encourage learning activities and/or personal care routines.   1. Place two activity photos/symbols/objects on the ‘Now and Next’ board. To begin with the “Now” activity may need to be short and not too challenging for the child. *The length of the activity should increase over time, try to keep all activities positive when first using the board to encourage the child to cooperate. The “Next” activity should be something enjoyable as it is a reward for completing the “Now” activity e.g. bubbles* 2. Encourage your child to come to the ‘Now and Next’ board (you may initially need to take the board to them) encourage your child to look at the first activity say “Now…...” 3. Support your child to compete the ‘Now’ activity. *It may be helpful to have a green basket/box that you take the activity from. When the activity is finished say and/or sign “finished”, put the activity away or into a red basket/box.* 4. Support your child to return to the ‘Now and Next’ board and remove the competed activity from the board. *Initially you may need to remove the activity symbol in view of your child, gradually encourage them to participate in removing this*.   Once the child is familiar with this concept, the activities can increase such as “Now”, “Next” and “Then”.  <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-111-now-next-visual-aid> |  |
| Child struggles to stay focused on a task | Break down activities into smaller steps. You could use visuals to help prompt. |  |
| Offer regular movement breaks to break long tasks up into more manageable chunks. |  |
| Make sure the task is set at the ‘just right level’ to enable the child to achieve and experience success. |  |
| Use a sand timer and prompt the child to refer back to this if they lose focus. |  |
| Child struggles to complete tasks on time | Repeat instructions and use visual cues to reinforce understanding. Ask the child to repeat the instructions back, gradually increase the number and complexity of instructions given |  |
| Break task down, the child may need a step-by-step approach, either though written instructions or picture symbols |  |
| Highlight key information on a worksheet/written instruction |  |
| Use ‘fill in the gaps’ answers rather than the child having to organise a whole piece of work. When the child is ready slowly increase the amount of work the child needs to organise |  |
| Encourage the child to verbalise the steps needed in a task with questions such as ‘what do you need to do first’ and ‘what materials do you need’ |  |
| A child may benefit from the use of a clock or timer to help them understand how long they have to complete each step of the task |  |

For more attention and focus ideas visit [www.lambethschoolservices.co.uk/Article/42222](http://www.lambethschoolservices.co.uk/Article/42222)