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Occupational Therapy  
Department Centre

## Occupational Therapy Handout

### IMPROVING CONCENTRATION AND ATTENTION

#### Environment

- Try to reduce distractions going on around the child by working in a quiet area.
- Choose a quiet room/corner away from windows and doors, with minimal distractions.
- Create a space specifically for working and give it a positive title to this work area e.g. 'Brain Power' table.
- Limit the amount of materials to essential items, such as one book and one pen.
- For younger ones; initially choose toys / activities which naturally interest your child, use bright colours and attractive things.
- Reduce distractions such as pictures on the walls.
- Ensure he/she is sat at a table and chair of suitable height with their feet flat on the floor and elbows resting comfortably on the table top.
- Initially ask for short periods of attention and gradually increase.
- Create a reward system e.g. praise ticks on a blackboard, gold stars, public praise.
- Try keeping a log book to monitor progress.

#### Giving instructions

- Always make eye contact.
- Use short and simple phrases for instructions.
- Minimise sequence e.g. tasks at a time.
- If language is good ask them to verbally repeat instructions back to you
- Be flexible and try different approaches if appropriate
- Having a consistent system of giving instructions helps develop a routine for attention, such as getting whole class attention a particular way before giving instructions.
- Encourage the child to actively participate in demonstrations, or repeating back instructions, to show their understanding.

#### Daily schedule

- Write on board clearly and simply – refer to as move from activity to activity
- Older children – encourage them to keep own diary

#### Classroom organisation

- Keep class materials always in the same place – clearly labelled
- Try to keep classroom clutter free e.g. store materials in cupboard etc.
- Keep blackboard clutter free

### **Desk organisation**

- Provide written instructions
- Prepare worksheets
- Emphasise direct attention to important visual aspects of the task e.g. underlining, highlights, star beginning and end.
- Use “fill the gaps” answers rather than requiring the child to complete setting out/lengthy writing process.

### **Difficulty starting activity**

- Give signal to begin working
- Present work in small amounts
- Explain purpose of the work
- Provide immediate feedback and encouragement
- Use timer and ask child to say how long work will take.

### **Difficulty staying on task**

- Allow the child to continue with an easier part of the task until you can help
- Tell the child in advance where you expect difficulties
- Develop a system of mini-breaks when tension gets too much.
- You may consider 2 places of work for an individual child so they can get up and move around
- It may be helpful to allow the child to work in different positions – seated, standing, on the floor
- Use frequent reinforcement
- Encourage eye contact

### **Difficulty staying seated**

- Have clear expectations of “good sitting”. Use a photo to reinforce the practice.
- Reward good sitting
- Use a carpet square or spot to keep place at ‘carpet time’
- Remove distractions. Position in class where least likely to be passed by others
- Have equipment needed to hand and reduce the need to wander.
- Organise and label the room so that things are easy to find

### **Needing a lot of attention**

- Assign a buddy/peer for support
- Ensure child has all requirements for the task

### **Working independently**

- Provide activities that are appropriate to the individual child’s development level.
- Be certain the child can foresee and end to the task
- Give brief precise directions
- Give frequent reinforcement, praise the child in front of peers for concentrating
- Alternate short independent tasks with tasks on which you give assistance
- Gradually require more independent work before giving help.

### **Difficulty following directions**

- Give short, clear, specific directions
- Repeat directions and have child repeat them back to you
- Use written directions and plans
- Use a buddy who can help with instructions
- Position child in class close to your teaching area

### **If student fidgets**

- Allow child to hold a small koosh ball or rubber ball
- Redirect the child to a more constructive task, hand the child an object or book
- Ignore it

### **If the student daydreams**

- When given a worksheet suggest the child use a coloured pencil or marker to underline or emphasise directions.
- Place the child nearer to you
- Reduce activities that require sustained attention. Allow child structured opportunities to get up and move by collecting materials, putting away items, handing out etc.
- Use of egg timer to focus attention to task

### **If student calls out**

- Reward listening
- Reward child immediately when you observe them waiting to respond
- Use class room rule cue card to remind child not to call Out
- Reward peers that do not call out
- Give each child 3 squares of paper. During whole class activity. If anyone calls out remove a square. Students with all squares at end are rewarded.

### **Difficulty following classroom rules**

- Display rules clearly and reinforce rules verbally and with pictures
- Keep rules clear, specific and simple
- Be consistent with rule implementation and consequences to breaking rules, give child own list of the rules.
- Use classroom contracts with pupils and parents

### **Hyperactivity**

- Deep firm pressure is often useful to calm down, push on shoulders, roll up in mat/blanket – make hot dogs!
- Time out space in classroom e.g. with soft furniture/bean bag
- Place heavy bean bag on child's thighs whilst sat at desk
- Keep tasks short and allow short rest breaks if tired.

**Memory** *Memory and attention are interlinked, if you cannot attend to a task long enough to absorb and store the information, it will not be remembered and therefore not learned.*

- Kim's game – place several objects on a table, look at the items then cover them up and ask your child to recall the items remembered. Progress by adding more items
- Card games – using an ordinary pack of cards,
- Try using prompts such as a diary, calendar, note book and things to do list.

### **Difficulty remembering**

- Use mnemonics
- Have child repeat directions
- Use songs, poems, rhymes to enhance recall
- Colour code significant details.
- Give short, clear, specific instructions 1 at a time
- Use charts /pictures/ whiteboard to reinforce time table
- Avoid changing the learning environment frequently and routines.

