 

**Supporting attention and concentration**

**What is attention span?**

This is a child’s ability to give their undivided attention to a specific task. They need to block out all other distractions, such as watching what someone else is doing, listening to music or watching TV.

**Why is it important?**

Children need a well-developed concentration span to help them learn. Children who struggle to focus in school often miss out on learning and don’t keep up with their peers. The best time to support this important skill is while children are young and we can actively build their focus.

**How long should my child be able to concentrate?**

It’s perhaps not as long as you think. The average concentration span for a preschool child is 15 minutes. That is 15 minutes complete focus on one task. For young pre-schoolers (aged 3) it is 5 minutes. As children get older, they can concentrate for longer periods, but if you are worried about your child’s ability to focus, first check if you are expecting them to concentrate for longer than 15 minutes.

**How can I support my child to concentrate?**

Here are some tips you can try to help support your child to become better at focusing on a task:

1. Keep it small: it’s better to ‘chunk’ a task into smaller tasks, giving breaks in between rather than try and sit for an hour.
2. Tune in to your child’s interests: children will naturally focus on something that interests them, so use this as your starting point to improve their focus. For example, if you know your child enjoys messy play, but is not interested in writing (using paper and pens), introduce mark making material to sand, mud, gloop, etc.
3. Limit screen time: using technology is important and has benefits to children’s learning when used in moderation. We know that too much screen time reduces children’s ability to concentrate. Flashing images are over-stimulating and mean children can struggle to process information.
4. Play with your child: this is the single most effective thing you can do to support your child’s learning. By joining in with your child’s play you show that your share their interests, you can share ideas, introduce new skills, new words, and encourage them to stay focused until the task is done.
5. The key word is PLAY: we know that children are learning all the time, but to them, they are playing. Play gives children the chance to practice what they are learning. Play is a child’s work…and it is fun!

**Activities to improve attention span**

Here are some ideas to help build your child’s ability to focus:

* Board games: your child will need to focus on whose turn it is, remember the rules, count, and pay attention.
* Jigsaw puzzles: with some activities, such as drawing, children can simply stop when they become bored and lose concentration. Puzzles provide opportunities to persevere and stay focused until it is finished.
* I spy: use initial sounds, colours, descriptions (e.g. something that is round, can bounce, is soft)
* Rhyme time: make up a rhyming string (e.g. cat, hat, bat, mat, etc) and keep going until you run out of words
* Lego challenge: challenge your child to build an entire theme that you’ve chosen (e.g. farm, space station, dino word)
* Noughts and crosses: a simple game that encourages turn taking, following rules, planning and strategy!
* Story time: make up a story with your child. Choose a story your child knows well, then change some of the details. For example, When Jack climbs up the beanstalk, the Giant catches him. What happens next?

