

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING (ABLE)

Ideas for Attention

Activation

- Establish a daily classroom routine and schedule
- Go over basic class rules each morning
- Some children may prefer a personal timetable to structure the day. Timetables may include photographs, boardmaker visuals or text
- Organise desks and folders daily
- Outline the lessons before starting. Share the big picture, learning intentions and success criteria
- Make sure the child understands what is required before beginning the task
- Help the pupil to get started by, for example, reading the first page, writing the first sentence or completing the first sum. Parents may also use this strategy with homework tasks.
- Maintain eye contact with child during verbal instructions
- Make instructions clear and concise
- Be consistent with daily instructions
- Give advanced warning when something very important is about to be communicated. Ensure you have the pupil's attention by saying their name and establishing eye contact
- The child may need repetition of instructions or explanations - do this in a calm, positive manner
- Ask the pupil to rehearse instructions or give them a written version
- Teach reflective listening: teach the child to say "You want me to...", "You're saying that...", or other reflective statements. This will confirm to you that they have heard what you have just said, and it will also reinforce the message as they repeat it back to you.

Focus and Effort

- Try preferential seating:
 - close to the teacher
 - away from distractions
 - with/near good role models
- Increase distance between desks
- Provide a quiet area that is available to all pupils
- Ask older children to experiment with seating positions and report back to you

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage peer tutoring, co-operative learning and the use of formative assessment strategies, such as talking partners and learning partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cue pupil to stay on task, eg the teacher could develop a private signal system with the child to notify them that they have "tuned out" or are behaviour inappropriately and so bring them back on task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some children's alertness may improve if they have a healthy snack
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All pupils should have access to water
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide short movement breaks between assignments - take a "brain break"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow opportunities for pupils to move around the room. These children should be allowed "stretch breaks", times when they need to move or walk around the room. These "stretch breaks" need to be structured so that the pupil is aware that these are not times for talking or disrupting others and that there are a maximum number of breaks allowed per day. These breaks will need to be explained to the other pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of these children need something to do with their hands to help them concentrate, especially when sitting and listening (eg, doodling, handling a piece of plasticine or some other manual activity)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt the child to start work and stay on task. Provide frequent, immediate and consistent feedback on behaviour and redirection back to task.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These children should be required to produce relatively small amounts of work or focused attention at one time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break long lessons into easily attainable steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks should be broken up into short segments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give one task at a time and monitor frequently
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the time allowed/provide a timer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide short breaks between tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate interesting with less interesting tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a "first - then" approach, ie first do the set task, then an activity the pupil likes and finds motivating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict homework to what is essential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents to institute frequent breaks during homework
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with the pupil ways in which they can make learning and task completion easier for themselves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with the pupil ways in which you, the teacher, can make learning and task completion easier for the child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment with headphones - try soothing/stimulating music

- Use interests to motivate and strengthen on-task behaviour
- Build topic of work around the child's interests
- Take account of the pupil's preferred learning style. These children may find it easier to focus when information is delivered in more than one way, use multi-sensory approach, use visuals and colour, use interactive teaching approaches.
- Think carefully about the design of work sheets and assessments:
 - use large type and have only one or two activities per sheet
 - keep page format simple
 - avoid extraneous pictures/visuals that are not directly related to the task
 - write clear, simple instructions
 - allow the pupil to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways rather than always requiring written work
 - shorten tasks; if the pupil can demonstrate their understanding in 5 questions, don't ask them to complete 10
- Share the learning intention and success criteria with pupils this helps them focus on what is important for them to be successful in a particular piece of learning
- Reminder cards on their desk may help some pupils stay focused. The exact wording, illustration on the card should be worked out with the pupil.
- Pupils can be asked to rate their distractibility during certain periods. Students can keep score of the number of times they catch themselves looking out of the window, listening to voices outside the classroom etc. They can give themselves points every time they can refocus their attention.
- When processing is too slow encourage the child to read or work at a quicker pace. When necessary impose time limits, it may help to use a timer.
- Pupils who have trouble maintaining their focus need to be reminded in school and at home to get back on track. They may benefit from being told in advance how long they will need to concentrate on something.
- Praise the pupil when he/she manages to sustain attention appropriately.
- Help these children distinguishing information that is important/relevant from information that is unimportant/irrelevant by providing opportunities to:
 - develop skills of summarising
 - circle/highlight the main ideas in texts
 - paraphrase what the teacher has just said
 - identify the most important characteristics of a person, a place or an event

- make up questions about the text/lesson to help pinpoint significant information

- When the pupil recalls irrelevant information during discussion or in writing, teacher feedback needs to focus on the process of determining what is important. Teacher feedback based on the success criteria for the learning provides a framework for this.

Action

- In communicating with children with attention difficulties it is especially important that the same terminology, the same methods and the same interpretations are used at home and at school. There is a need for consistency and good communication between home and school.
- Talk to the pupil about their behaviour and/or learning. Institute "what if" exercises in behaviour, social and/or academic areas (eg "What if you call your friend names? How will that make him feel about you?")
- Circle Time provides opportunities for such discussions.
- Discuss the end product/goal and how this can be achieved (eg "What do you want to say in this report?" "How would you like your behaviour to be in the playground?"). Then help the pupil plan ways of achieving that end product/goal.
- Teach/work on problem solving strategies in social, behavioural and academic areas.
- In confronting new challenges/problems, systematically review alternative strategies and select the "best bet" and back-up strategies.
- When things go wrong review the situation with the child and focus on what they could have done differently
- Help the pupil review alternative strategies before undertaking a task or an activity (eg, a teacher might highlight a range of strategies that can be used to learn to spell irregular words. Pupils then try this out and comment on what works best for them and why).
- Encourage a stop, wait and count to ten approach
- Introduce schedules/timetables for the child both at home and at school
- Stress time estimation (how long should this take me?)
- Hold regular discussions regarding time and time management, eg as part of a work or study plan, older pupils should document in advance how long they think the different stages of a task ought to take. They should review these estimates with an adult to help determine if they are realistic. While working on the activity, pupils should keep track of the time they actually take.
- Model step by step approaches to tasks whenever possible

- Make it clear that being "first finished" is not one of the success criteria and not what the teacher is looking for. Praise the pupil when they are working at an appropriate pace.
- When children move about too quickly and get into trouble, they should be taken aside and encouraged to slow down and think about what they are doing. When there are signs of hyperactivity teachers need to allow children chances to move about, eg cleaning the board, collecting resources for the group, taking a message etc. Many children with hyperactive tendencies actually need to keep moving, try to find non-disruptive ways for them to be active.
- Move towards self-monitoring, eg the child keeps track of the due dates for homework completion, appropriate behaviour and conforming to rules.
- Train the pupil to use self-monitoring to check how they are doing. In learning tasks the pupil should be encouraged to stop and check mid-task and at the end of the task. Use of success criteria will provide a framework for the pupil to use in their self-assessment. Praise accurate self-assessment. After self-assessment discuss what went well, what went wrong and how it can be improved.
- Pupils should look at the mistakes they have made in tasks and try to explain why they made specific errors, eg "I did it too fast" or "I didn't understand the question" or "I couldn't remember how to do that". There should be strong incentives for engaging in this kind of analysis.
- Use proof reading exercises and praise the successful finding and correction of errors. Allow the pupil a break before asking them to proof read their own work.
- In monitoring their behaviour let the child know they can signal to you when they need to go to a quiet corner or have time out.
- Use personal diaries, behaviour checklists/charts to help the pupil review the events of the past days and about how they might affect her future actions. The discussion should stress lessons learned for the future.
- Reinforce positive behaviour as much as possible. The more often you are positive about particular aspects of a child's behaviour, the more the issue will be reinforced, eg "Thank you for waiting your turn", is simple but very effective.
- Praise should be public and "problem solving" private