



# Humber Sensory Processing Service

Community Services for Children  
aged 0-18 years



**Attention and concentration**

Sitting and concentrating can be tricky, even for adults! There are lots of different factors which can impact our ability to pay attention and concentrate on a task. This document will explore some of those factors and give you some strategies to try when concentrating feels tough. Paying attention doesn't just happen at nursery, school, or college, we also do it at home; the strategies below can be used in any of these environments.

## Development

One of the first things to consider when thinking about attention and concentration is, where is the child or young person developmentally? Although they may be a certain age, their developmental skills could be the same as someone much younger. We would not expect an 18-month-old to be able to attend to and concentrate on a task for a long time. We should consider the developmental age of a child before we think about how long they "should be able" to focus on a task for. Sometimes we should think about the expectations we place on a child and consider if they are realistic.

## Other factors

- Consider if the child or young person finds the academic work tricky. Are they not concentrating because they find the task too difficult? Do they have any learning difficulties, such as dyslexia which may make certain tasks harder? It is well researched that neurodiverse conditions such as ADHD can also affect attention and concentration.
- Our ability to concentrate can fluctuate and can be negatively affected by things like, not getting enough sleep, feeling unwell, feeling stressed, or not getting enough movement.
- Our concentration levels can also vary throughout the day, we generally have times of the day when we find it easier to concentrate, try to build routines around the times of the day when the child's concentration is better.



- Whether we are interested in an activity, can affect our concentration and attention. We are much more likely to engage for longer if the task is interesting to us.
- Be mindful of what might be happening around the child when you are asking them to concentrate or attend on something – is it realistic in that setting?

## Strategies

- Before activities where your child needs to concentrate, start with a movement task, or brain gym activity.
- Try sitting your child away from busy areas of the classroom or house i.e., away from doors, windows or other distracting sounds and visuals.
- For tabletop activities, ensure the child is sitting with feet flat on the floor or with feet supported with a footstool.
- Allow for changes of position e.g., sitting or lying on the floor, a standing station or easel and going for a walk.
- Using a stretchy exercise band around the chair legs to allow movement whilst doing tabletop activities.
- Consider the use of a weighted lap bag or shoulder pet.
- Using ear defenders for focused times. Some children will benefit from the use of a personal music player with instrumental music to filter out other auditory distractions. Ensure they have understood the instructions before using these items.
- Hand fidgets may help some children by keeping their hands busy while they are listening, e.g., stress ball, Koosh ball, rubber band, Blu Tack. You might want to consider using a fidget contract.
- Using chewing gum or a chewable item e.g., necklace, bracelet, or pencil end.



- Allowing movement breaks as needed (see the proprioceptive activities document).
- Identify non-verbal signals to use when overwhelmed or needing a break. Some children find it difficult to articulate their needs or ask for help. By providing a 'time out card', 'toilet pass' or other means to indicate that they may be feeling worried and/ or need a break.
- Call the child to get their attention or use a visual cue before giving them an instruction. Get the child to repeat the instruction back so you know they have understood, if they would find this difficult, check their understanding with how they are carrying out the task.
- Research has shown that the more senses used during a learning experience, the more likely the child will retain the information; therefore, provide learning in a multi-sensory manner – use of smells, sounds, visuals etc.
- To help concentration during activities your child does not enjoy, try using a timer; set a time frame that is realistic for the child to concentrate for and then have a movement break. You can gradually build up the time they are required to concentrate for.



For more advice and strategies like this, you can visit our website:  
**[sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk](https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk)**

Or you can contact us with a question on the email address below:  
**[hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net](mailto:hnf-tr.humbersensoryprocessingservice@nhs.net)**

