

## Focus and Attention for Learning Tasks

Sensory processing differences may contribute to our ability to be focussed and pay attention. We pay attention to noises, smells and movement in our environment to keep ourselves safe. Some people find it hard to filter out some of these sensations which can make it very hard to stay focussed on an activity. Other people may not notice these types of sensations and can miss information from their environment. This can make it hard to focus on learning tasks.

The following ideas are designed to help address these challenges. When using them, consider your child's age, any potential risks and their sensory preferences. Reflect on how to adapt these strategies to best support your child in feeling calm and relaxed during washing.

Area of Difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments
Child is distracted by noise or movement of others whilst completing task	Consider the child's seat within the classroom. If at the front they may not become distracted by others when listening to the teacher, however, may rotate in their seat at others noise or movement in group discussions/tasks. At the back of the classroom, they may find it hard to focus on the teacher but may find it easier to focus during whole class activity. Consider placing the child's seat at the end of the row to minimise distraction from pupils on both sides.	
	Use a workstation area for focussed work. Purpose built desks and screens can be purchased. An alternative solution may be to position a desk against a wall in a distraction free area of the room. Avoid clutter on the desk space or visual displays on the wall in front. For further information see Worksheet Z-Sitting for Tabletop Tasks in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Sensory Resource Pack' on our website.	
	Reduce background noise where possible when asking for focussed work. Alternatively, play consistent, predictable background noise at a gentle volume.	
	Reduce background screens for example, interactive whiteboards during focussed work.	
	Consider trialling headphones (with a set playlist), noise reduction ear pods or ear defenders. Create clear boundaries about when these should be used and encourage breaks from using them to ensure their efficiency.	
Child is distracted by internal feelings whilst completing task	Ensure basic needs are met such as hunger, thirst and need to go to the toilet. Could they be distracted due to pain, illness or discomfort?	

	Ensure the child is comfortable on their seat – see the <a href="#">Worksheet -Sitting Still for Tabletop Tasks</a> in the 'Occupational Therapy Sensory Resource Pack' on our website.	
	Ensure the child is feeling regulated and focused to work. They may need time to explore strategies to express their feelings and emotions before being ready to focus to work.	
Child is daydreaming when trying to complete task	Create visually engaging handouts/workbooks. Use topics of interest to help focus.	
	Use multi-sensory approaches to engage them into the task, for example cut, stick, draw, watch videos.	
	Prior to static tabletop tasks. Engage the child in alerting activities. See <a href="#">Worksheet B-Attention and Focus</a> in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Pre-School Resource Pack' on our website.	
	Use alerting fiddle toys such as those which vibrate or change colour. Vibrating pens can draw attention to writing tasks <a href="#">ARK's Tran-Quill® Vibrating Pen - Sensory Needs Ltd</a>	
	Check in with the child to ensure they heard instructions. Provide written prompts for them to refer to for each stage of the task.	
Child is distracted by the environment	Consider position of seating within room: doorways, ends of rows and next to the teacher's desk can be busy areas with people coming and going. By a window may provide high levels of distraction outside the room.	
	Reduce visual distraction where possible: reduce visual displays, screens with moving displays, objects hanging from ceilings. Consider drawing blinds to reduce glare, reflections of distractions outside the room.	
	Consider distracting smells: from canteen's, toilets, class activities. Ensure adequate ventilation. Avoid spaces near these smells for focussed learning until the smell has gone. Use sweat bands or pieces of material to add a favourable smell too for the child to keep close and block out the environmental smell.	
	Review background noise: try strategies noted above when high levels of background noise are unavoidable	
	Ask children to repeat the instructions back to you to ensure they understand what is expected of them.	

**Useful resources:**

Humber Sensory Processing Hub: [Learning – Attention and Concentration – Sensory Processing](https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk/learning-attention-and-concentration/) <https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk/learning-attention-and-concentration/>

Sensory Processing in Learning: [Sensory processing in learning | Essex Partnership University NHS Trust](https://eput.nhs.uk/patient-carer-and-visitor/children-and-young-people-experiencing-sensory-processing-needs/sensory-processing-in-learning/) <https://eput.nhs.uk/patient-carer-and-visitor/children-and-young-people-experiencing-sensory-processing-needs/sensory-processing-in-learning/>