

What is Focus?

How to help your child increase focus skills and improve concentration.

LearningWorks
for kids playing smarter in a digital world.



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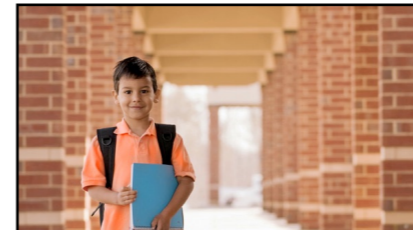
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What is Focus?

What Focus is all about, and how to tell if your child needs to improve it.

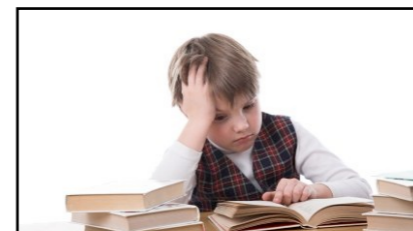
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Improving Focus

Tips and Strategies for Improving your child's Focus Skills

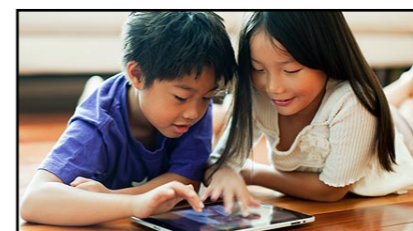
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Focus and Academics

Why strong Focus Skills are vital to a child's academic success.

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Focus and Digital Play

How healthy and responsible digital play can help improve Focus Skills

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What is Focus?

Kids With Good Focus Skills:

1. Are unlikely to waste time at the beginning of a test, chore, or other task.
2. Easily complete chores and homework without interruption.
3. Have little problem achieving long-term goals.
4. Can read a lengthy novel or write a book report.
5. Can sit and complete their homework in a timely fashion.
6. Continue to work on tasks that may be boring or dull, such as chores.



Focus is the thinking skill that allows people to begin a task without procrastination and then maintain their attention and effort until the task is complete. Focus helps people pay attention in the midst of distractions and setbacks and to sustain the effort and energy needed to reach a goal.

Focus is one of the most important thinking skills for academic success, as it helps kids begin tasks without procrastinating, maintain their attention in the presence of distractions, and continue tasks through to completion. Focus is very helpful when children are engaged in activities that require

sustained practice in order to improve, and it is useful for developing the skills needed for playing an instrument or learning a new sport.

The thinking skill of focus is a compilation of three executive skills identified in Dawson and Guare's model. It consists of sustained attention, which Dawson and Guare describe as "the capacity to attend to a situation or task in spite of distractibility"; task initiation, which Dawson and Guare describe as "the ability to begin a task in a timely fashion"; and goal-directed persistence, which Dawson and Guare describe as "the capacity or drive to follow through to completion of a goal and not be put off by other demands or competing interests."

The Learning Works for Kids thinking skill of focus combines these three components into a skill identifiable by parents and educators as the capacity to get started on a task and sustain one's attention and effort to complete the task.

As an executive function, focus requires the ability to avoid daydreaming and quickly become tuned into a task, knowing how and where to start on it. It then involves remaining attentive to the task and ignoring other distractions or interests. In order to complete the task, persistence and sustained effort are necessary. Focus is a primary and necessary component for learning in any environment. If one is unable to start paying attention and sustain

one's focus, one is unlikely to be able to learn effectively.

Kids With Underdeveloped Focus Skills:

1. Get up and down frequently while doing their homework.
2. Are easily distracted by noise and activities surrounding them.
3. Frequently complain about being bored.
4. Have difficulty sitting through an entire meal.
5. Procrastinate and have difficulties getting started on tasks.
6. Turn in incomplete or hastily-completed schoolwork.
7. Often don't finish what they start.

Improving Focus



These are some general strategies and ideas for helping kids to improve their Focus skills.

1. Follow boring and mundane tasks with interesting and stimulating tasks. Your child may be more inclined to complete uninteresting tasks when they can look forward to doing something they enjoy after the task is completed, such as going outside to play after finishing their homework or having dessert after they are done eating their dinner.
2. Provide external support for your child that tapers off over time. This could involve coaching them through their first few homework problems or prompting them to start a chore at home. Support could also consist of

“Find the best places to sit and study. Physical comfort can play an important role in an individual’s capacity to sustain attention.”

helping them to form a list of the smaller tasks that each larger task entails, and to then assist them in identifying which of these tasks should be worked on first.

3. Encourage your child to participate in activities that require their full attention. For example, in baseball, have them play catcher, pitcher, or first base. These positions will require them to sustain his attention more than those in the outfield. In music, they should be encouraged to play instruments that are a regular part of the band or orchestra rather than something like cymbals, which are rarely used.
4. Reward stick-to-it-iveness. When your child experiences the rewards of sticking with a difficult task and completing it, they will be more motivated to do so again the next time. Offering treats, privileges, or simply verbal praise when chores are satisfactorily completed without prompting, can be very rewarding.
5. Find the best places to sit and study. Physical comfort can play an important role in an individual's capacity to sustain attention. When it comes to studying,

sitting at a desk on a hard chair with a lamp may not be the most comfortable setting. Some children do best sitting on their beds, others while laying on the floor. Encourage standing, stretching, sitting on bar stools or other elevated chairs if this can help your child concentrate. While this technique may not increase test scores, it is likely to increase the amount of time that your child can tune into work effectively.

6. Food is energy fuel. Tune in to your child's eating habits and energy levels. There are many children whose energy levels fluctuate based upon when they have last eaten. Make sure your child has nutritional snacks or drinks readily available. You may also wish to speak with teachers to ensure that your child takes an appropriate break for a mid-morning, or mid-afternoon snack during class. Fresh fruit, granola bars, baby carrots with dip, chocolate milk, fruit juices, peanut butter with bananas, apples and roasted nuts are all popular and healthy selections that can help in both boosting focus or as a reward for completing a task.



Focus and Academic Skills

Focus and Academic Skills Focus is a core skill for learning academic skills and school-based information.

If students cannot sustain their attention and effort on a task, they are likely to encounter a great deal of difficulty when learning complex material. Before students can ace their next test or apply other thinking skills such as Organization and Working Memory, they

need to be able to tune out distractions and pay attention to what they are being taught in the classroom.

Improvements in Focus can help children concentrate more closely on their work, begin classwork without delay, better absorb new learning material, and remain attentive while taking on lengthy or difficult school assignments that demand more time and effort.

Reading

- Focus helps children sustain their attention while reading.
- Focus prevents kids from becoming distracted by their thoughts or external events.
- Focus helps children to re-read text when necessary in order to fully comprehend the material.

Math:

- Focus helps children to sustain their attention on a multi-step math problem.
- Focus helps children to stay focused when solving a word problem so that they can recall all of the information and steps necessary to solve it.
- Focus prevents kids from getting distracted in the middle of multi-step problems.
- Focus helps kids be persistent when faced with difficult math concepts that require extended instruction.



• Writing:

- Focus aids children with the process of putting thoughts into writing as ideas come to them.
- Focus helps kids sustain their effort when doing physical tasks such as writing or typing.
- Focus helps kids to know where and how to get started on writing essays, book reports, and other assignments.

Focus and Digital Play



Digital Play is filled with opportunities to improve Focus.

Playing video games, researching topics on the Internet, and learning how to use new apps all demand a variety of thinking skills. Proficiency with many digital tools requires the ability to apply skills such as Planning, Organization, Working Memory, or Focus. For children, the attraction of digital media makes games and apps an ideal teaching tool for engaging them in ways to exercise important cognitive skills and understand how they apply to the real world, both in school and at home.

Focus is a helpful skill in many types of video games. For example, in fast-moving games such as racing or action

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games, players must often attend simultaneously to multiple events in order to avoid danger. In slow-moving games, players often need to pay attention to small details which may be relevant for success at later levels. Sustained focus and effort are also needed for many of the more complex, multi-layered games where players are likely to encounter obstacles to reach their goals.

Interactive digital media can be a great tool for enhancing focus in children who might otherwise find it extremely difficult. For example, some children are better able to focus on a reading assignment using an e-reader rather than a paperbound book. In other settings, a multi-media presentation of information, such as a website video, may also help to sustain a child's attention.

Digital play can help kids improve Focus skills by helping them to:

- Learn to ignore extraneous activities and attend only to elements that are important within the game.



- Attend to multiple sources of information at the same time.
- Shift their attention back and forth between items in a game in order to move to a higher level.
- Sustain their attention to digital media-based academic content that might not otherwise interest

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