



February 2022

From the Director's Chair – by Rita Dai Wang

Registration Referral Bonus: Thank you to everyone who has already registered for the 2022-2023 school year. We love having families come back! The highest compliment our parents can pay us is the referral of family or friends. The trust that you place in us means a great deal. In appreciation, you will receive a \$50 credit off one month's tuition for every new enrollment as a result of your referral.

HEPA Air Purifiers: We have purchased 2 HEPA air purifiers for the classrooms – Medify MA-40. The Medify uses a H13 HEPA filter which filters out 99.9% of particles down to .1 microns in size. Standard coronavirus particles range from .06 to .14 microns in diameter. The upstairs classroom is approximately 1500 sq ft, and the downstairs classroom is approximately 1100 sq ft. This air purifier will filter through all the air in each classroom in 30-60 minutes. While this isn't a guarantee against coronavirus, it is another layer in mitigation we can add on to handwashing, masking, getting vaccinated, and staying home when sick.

Attention Span: One of the most important skills young children need to develop is attention span – the ability to tune out distractions and focus on a given task. This can be easy if they are focusing on a favorite activity (like building Legos) but more difficult if the activity at hand is less of a favorite (like listening to the teacher during Circle Time). The pandemic, while originally giving us the opportunity to slow down our frenetic pace of life, has increased our baseline level of anxiety and uncertainty. This has had a documented decline in attention span in both adults and children. Unfortunately, we have observed some of this here at school. The kids often prefer constant stimulation in the form of new/novel activities and "get bored" if they have downtime. It can be difficult for them to be still, to use their imagination, or to sustain play. I'd love to hear your thoughts on whether you are seeing this at home as well.

I'm attaching 2 articles below – one on the detrimental effects the pandemic has had on attention span and one on how to help your children develop this critical skill.

Dates to Remember

2/10 Valentine's Day celebration (2's)

2/14 Valentine's Day celebration (3's/4's)

2/21 President's Day-School Closed

Happy Birthday!



2/11 Rjver Thielen
2/27 Ben Reece

Try this at home!

Winter is a great time to practice fine-motor skills indoors! Give your child beads to thread, clothespins to clip, playdough to pound and shape, toothpicks to build into structures, or spaghetti to thread into straws!

4 Reasons Children Should Play Outside in the Cold

- Strengthens the immune system
- Helps to burn extra energy
- Promotes problem-solving and cognitive thinking
- Boosts vitamin D levels and uplifts mood

<https://www.pentagonplay.co.uk/news-and-info/4-reasons-children-play-outside-cold-weather>



Valentine's Day Foam

1. In a bowl, add 2 tbsp dish soap and ¼ cup water. Add food coloring or liquid water color.
2. Mix with a hand mixer for 1-2 minutes or until the foam forms stiff peaks.
3. Make more as needed!

<http://www.thepaigediaries.com/2018/01/Valentines-day-foam-sensory-tub/>



For those of you with kids who are moving on to Kindergarten next year, here is a link to the HCPSS Getting Ready for Kindergarten page. It has good activities for you to be doing right now as well as a slideshow detailing kindergarten readiness, the kindergarten program, and the registration process. Good luck on the next stage in your adventure – we will miss you!

<https://www.hcpss.org/enroll/kindergarten/>



The Pandemic has Destroyed our Attention Spans, Here's How to Regain Focus



by Marie Claire Dorking

March 29, 2021

This time last year when we had taken our first tentative steps into lockdown we had grand plans for how we were going to fill our time: Learning a language, taking up a new hobby or even writing that novel we've always wanted to.

Fast forward 12 months and we've struggled to even finish reading a book, let alone managed to write one. The problem, it seems, is that we've lost our ability to focus on anything at all. Even scrolling social media is a struggle these days, as our increasingly short attention span makes it hard to concentrate on things that used to be simple every day tasks.

So what's going on? Why have our attention spans taken such a hit lately?

The unpredictable nature of the past year has contributed to our lack of focus, according to Niels Eék, psychologist and co-founder of mental health and self-development platform [Remente](#). "As the UK looks back on a full year of COVID-19-related lockdowns and restrictions, many may find that their attention span has diminished, or that they are struggling to focus or concentrate on the smallest things," he explains. "Throughout the pandemic, we have been in a continuous state of flux, with restrictions and measures frequently changing. "This unpredictability may be causing many to be feeling rather flummoxed by the fact that we are unable to plan, or even maintain a regular routine, resulting in a cyclical situation of stress and worry.

"The inability to form plans and create routines has also left many people often feeling overwhelmed by the simplest of situations, which is a natural coping mechanism as the body goes into survival mode," Eék continues. "The long-term implications of which can, however, result in heightened stress levels and an inability to focus."

Eék says stress can be one of the biggest causes of a muddled mind. "Prolonged feelings of stress may lead to the overproduction of the hormone cortisol," he explains. "This can have a negative impact on our ability to think straight and remember pieces of information."

Our increased reliance on technology may have also played a part in the destruction of our attention spans. "In my opinion, it's not necessarily the lockdown/pandemic that has affected our attention span, it's the over use of screens - smart phones, social media, computer gaming, TV, laptops and so on," explains [Dr Kalanit Ben-Ari](#), psychologist, author and founder of [The Village](#). "It's the 'psychology of the mind' behind all of these to make sure we are coming back to the screen. The over-stimulation creates a FOMO effect, training our brains to seek fast stimulation."

Dr Ben-Ari says that spending an increased amount of time looking at screens becomes an addictive behaviour which can have a knock-on impact on our focus. "We crave immediate gratification rather than staying, imagining, concentrating, reflecting, wondering, or just 'being' without 'doing'," she explains.

In addition to constant notifications pulling our focus, Dr Ben-Ari says even just the presence of a phone can interfere with our concentration. "There is evidence to show that concentration is lower when our phone is in the room, even if it's on silent," she explains. "It's like our mind is worried about missing out, if we don't see an Insta post or a text, we will miss out on something hugely important. The problem is that this is a vicious cycle - the more you use social media/apps etc, the more your brain seeks this kind of stimulation."

Being on technology from dawn til dusk is playing havoc with our stress levels, which will have a knock on impact on our ability to concentrate. "Whether for work, pleasure or simply to pass the time, [research](#) shows that digital overload can contribute to increased feelings of stress and anxiety, therefore impacting our ability to

concentrate when needed," Eék explains. "Constant news updates, notifications, and messages throughout the day can all cause our bodies to produce more of the stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline, which can, in turn, cause nervousness, anxiety, and restlessness. "The barrage of news about the pandemic that we get through our phones and screens can also cause or worsen feelings of stress and anxiety."

Digital devices give us access to an almost infinite amount of information, which can lead us down the dangerous path of getting caught up in a continuous stream of negative news and articles, also known as 'doom scrolling'. "[Research](#) has shown us that digital overload can contribute to increased feelings of stress, as a constant barrage of negative news can cause our bodies to produce more of the stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline, eventually leaving us feeling overwhelmed and unable to think straight," Eék explains.

How to regain your focus

The good news is, there are some steps we can take to combat attention span zapping stress and reduce our exposure to technology. To rebuild your attention span and regain your ability to focus, try the following:

Get back into a routine

A steady daily routine is important, according to Eék, as it can provide you with some sort of normality in an otherwise uncertain time. "These routines don't necessarily need to look like the ones you would normally follow outside of lockdown," he says. "Creating small routines in your day, like getting up and dressed at the same time each morning, or eating meals at set times, can be one way to create a structure for the day, leaving you feeling less aimless and more positive."

Create 'quiet time' away from technology

Take some time-out from the tech, to jump start your focus. "For example, as people cannot take their phones to the shower, this becomes the only place to break from screens," explains Dr Ben-Ari. "This is also a place where people reflect and find solutions and creativity to solve problems or dilemmas." Dr Ben-Ari suggests taking all screens out of the bedroom. "Leaving your bedroom a 'tech free space' will not only improve your sleep quality but also improve your concentration," she explains. "Try reading a book before falling asleep instead. Your energy levels the next day should improve. Eék also suggests setting aside some time in your day where you put your phone away or avoid screens entirely can help your brain recover from the stresses of the day. "Reducing exposure to external stressors in your day will help you to gain mental clarity," he adds.

Pause and take a deep breath

As we've seen, stress is likely one of the reasons why we are feeling a little hazy right now. "When you are feeling stressed, breathing techniques can be a simple but effective way to focus on the task at hand, enabling you to continue with more mental clarity," Eék explains. "Practising breathing exercises at different times throughout the day, or in the moments you find yourself feeling really overwhelmed, can calm your mind, reduce stress and help you to find more focus."

Set yourself goals

It is easy to get bogged down with feelings of stress and frustration when you cannot concentrate or focus properly. "Goal setting can be a great way to help manage how we react to the world around us and, in turn, put us more at ease," Eék explains. "While never-ending to-do lists can seem daunting, and leave us feeling a little overwhelmed, setting yourself achievable goals throughout the day can be a great way to help focus the mind, and reduce stress, enabling you to concentrate on the task at hand without losing focus and procrastinating."

Know that it's okay to seek help

If you are feeling continuously stressed and overwhelmed, or find that you are struggling to cope, seek help from your GP. "Maintaining good mental health is as important as maintaining good physical health," Eék says. "You can also look to websites and mental health charities that are there to help, such as [Anxiety UK](#), [Mind](#) or [Rethink Mental Illness](#) for additional resources."

Simple Activities to Increase Preschoolers' Attention Span



By: [Tanja Mcilroy](#) (EmpoweredParents.co)

Are you wondering how to improve the attention span of a child? One of the most important keys to success at school is having a well-developed concentration span. In this article I'll share some simple activities to increase attention span. Children who struggle to focus in class often miss out on many learning opportunities and don't keep up with their peers. It can be difficult to fix a concentration problem in an older child. The best time to work on this skill is during the early preschool years when you as a parent or teacher can actively build their focus.

What is Attention Span?

Attention or concentration span is a child's ability to give **undivided attention to a specific task** at hand. It requires blocking out all other stimuli – such as **sound** (the class next door making a noise), **visuals** (watching what's happening outside the window) or **unnecessary information** (the irrelevant writing on the board).

During a school day, children need to concentrate repeatedly on different tasks, in an environment that can be very overstimulating for some. Monitor your child's concentration span during their preschool years and make sure it is increasing slowly with time. School will become extremely difficult and exhausting for a child who struggles to focus. As with all other [developmental skills](#), it is easier to build in the preschool years than later on in life.

What is the Average Attention Span of a Preschooler?

- It is generally accepted that a child can concentrate for **roughly 2 to 3 minutes per year of age**, so:
- The attention span of a **3-year-old** is approximately **6 to 9 minutes**.
- The attention span of a **4-year-old** is approximately **8 to 12 minutes**.
- The attention span of a **5-year-old** is approximately **10 to 15 minutes**.

This means the average concentration span of a preschooler is usually less than 15 minutes. That is, 15 minutes purely focused on one task. For younger preschoolers, it is 5 minutes.

This is only a general guide and children differ in their development. Children may **concentrate for longer** (even much longer) if they are **interested and engrossed** in an activity. If you are worried about your child's ability to focus, first ask yourself if you are expecting them to concentrate for a manageable block of time.

It is much more effective to work on **short tasks** and provide **frequent breaks** than to try and sit through an hour with a 4-year old. A great way to **refocus** your child during an activity is with **movement**.

Activities to Increase Attention Span in Preschoolers

You can build your child's ability to focus in these simple ways. Here are some activities to improve attention and concentration span in preschoolers.

1. Focus Games



Play games with your child that require a lot of focused attention. A child playing a [board game](#), for example, has to remember whose turn it is, follow the count on the dice, remember the rules, and pay attention throughout. Games like [Snakes and Ladders and Ludo](#) are great for building concentration.

Need more games that improve attention span? Try playing games like [Simon says](#), [I spy with my little eye](#) or the [the odd one out game](#). [Listening games](#) like [musical statues](#) and [broken telephone](#) will also build concentration. Another great game for building concentration is a memory game – played with pairs of matching cards.

2. Activities With an End Result

With certain activities, such as drawing a picture, children can simply stop when they lose concentration or become bored. However, give your child a puzzle and they will more than likely finish it since it will be incomplete if they don't. Provide opportunities like this and your child will persevere longer than they normally would, which will lengthen their concentration span over time. The best puzzles for young children are sturdy, wooden ones. Older preschoolers may be ready for [24-piece puzzles](#).

3. Movement Breaks

Not only does physical activity help develop children's concentration span in general, but it also helps reset and re-energize immediately. The most effective way to provide a break during an activity is through a quick brain break or a [movement activity](#).

[Brain breaks](#) can be as short as a minute. They will get the blood flowing and boost your child's concentration so he can continue on the activity for another few minutes. Think about how you feel when you are sitting in front of your computer working for a few hours. Just the simple act of getting up, making some coffee and walking around for 2 minutes can reset your body and make you feel fresh when you resume your work.

For children, not only do movement breaks help them to refresh and reset, but they are also an opportunity to develop [gross motor skills](#) such as core strength, [coordination](#) and balance, and even [cognitive skills](#).

4. Concentration Exercises

Here are 18 quick exercises you should try to do daily that will give kids a good stretch and refocus them on their tasks.

Sitting with your legs stretched out in front of you:

- Shake your knees and then your feet.
- Bend over and hold your toes.
- Stretch your toes forward.
- Stretch your toes back.



Stand and move your arms:

- Flap your arms up and down on your side, like a flying bird.
- Shrug your shoulders. Shrug one shoulder at a time, forwards and then backwards.
- Then shrug both shoulders together, forwards and then backwards.
- Swing your arms backwards and forwards.
- Rotate your arms to the side like a windmill. First make small rotations, then wider rotations. Start with one arm at a time, then both arms at the same time.

Walking exercises:

- Walk backwards using small steps, then large steps.
- Walk sideways, first to the right, then to the left.
- Pretend you are walking along a rope. Go in a straight line.

Balancing exercises:

- Stand on one leg. Count to 5, then swap and stand on the other leg.
- Stand on the tips of your toes. When you are balancing, close your eyes and stay on your tip-toes.
- Stand on the tips of your toes and walk around the room.
- Hop with feet together, then one foot at a time.

Lying down exercises:

- Pretend to be a ball: Hold your knees in tight. Pretend to be a ball and rock backwards, forwards and around.
- Seal slide: Lie flat on your tummy. Stretch your arms and legs by holding your feet. Then keep your legs bent and straighten your arms out to the side and lift your body off the ground. Walk the hands forward, dragging the legs.
- Flying plane: Lie flat on your tummy. Lift your arms and hold them in the air like an airplane. Then move your arms up and down.

5. Age-Appropriate Activities

Children will only develop their concentration span when doing activities that are age-appropriate. If you give your child a puzzle that is too advanced, he will give up early on and lose motivation. If the activity is too advanced or too long, your child will not find it meaningful and will lose interest. **Giving complex or formal activities will have the opposite effect to what you may have intended.**

The right length of time to expect a child to focus solely on one activity is roughly 2 to 3 minutes for each year of age. If you provide short [age-appropriate activities](#) that have a challenge but aren't impossible, your child will gradually start to spend a little more time as he matures.

6. Controlled Screen Time



Did you know that screen time actually **shortens your child's attention span?**

I once had a parent meeting where I had to inform a mom that her 4-year-old really struggled to pay attention in class. He could barely focus for a minute or two and was not able to follow any activity the class were doing. His mom was shocked and told me he was able to concentrate for hours when watching TV.

There was the problem.

Watching TV is not concentrating. Children are not actively engaged. They are staring passively at a device. When a child watches TV, the images on the screen are flashing at a rate that is unnatural to the brain. With repeated exposure, the brain becomes used to this stimulus. When the child then tries to interact with his normal environment, he struggles to process information that is flashing at a natural rate. Slightly scary. Screen time is unavoidable in today's times but can definitely be managed sensibly.

7. Daily Routine

Keeping a daily routine will help your child get used to daily activities and will teach them about patterns. When children know what's coming next, they are more inclined to want to get involved and do it. If your child knows it is indoor playtime now, they will settle quickly and find an appropriate play activity. You won't be fighting every day to drag them from the TV as their 20 minutes of TV will have its own time slot. Routine also gives a sense of security. This gives you the opportunity to schedule activities in a day that stimulate concentration.

8. Sleep and Nutrition

Having a healthy diet and sleeping a sufficient number of hours per night will have a massive impact on your child's ability to concentrate. Make sure bedtime is part of that non-negotiable routine.

9. Reading to Your Child

Unlike watching TV, when you read to your child it requires real attention and listening. [Reading to your child](#) is one of the most beneficial learning experiences. It is a fun and simple way to build your child's concentration span on a daily basis. The more interested your child is in the story, the more she will hang onto every word and pay attention.

To me, there is nothing better – or more educational – than a good [Dr. Seuss](#) or [Julia Donaldson](#) story. My kids can never get enough of them. They are so great for learning vocab and developing [auditory awareness](#) (through rhyming and repetition) and they are so entertaining, your kids will be paying attention.

10. Regular Exercise



Exercise has been proven to develop a child's concentration. It helps with memory, attention, mental sharpness and lowering anxiety, and also increases a child's energy. Make sure your children are active. The best way to do this is to encourage regular [free play](#), especially outdoors.

11. Respecting How Your Child Learns

Children have different learning styles and they will concentrate and perform best when learning in their preferred style. Visual learners prefer to see what they are learning, auditory learners prefer to hear what they are learning and kinesthetic learners need to touch and experience to learn. The majority of young children prefer kinesthetic ([hands-on learning](#)) and will learn best through physical experience. Pay attention to how your child best pays attention!

What if Your Child Has Concentration Problems?

[ADHD](#), or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, is characterized by impulsivity, overactivity or a lack of attentiveness. Some children display all three qualities. If you feel your child struggles to concentrate, there could be multiple factors, such as anxiety, immaturity, anger, etc. One cannot just assume it is ADHD.

The best thing to do is to monitor your child and be aware of their ability to focus. If your 5-year-old is unable to focus on anything or jumps from one task to another every minute, seek advice from a professional. ADHD can only be diagnosed by a professional, after which you can put the correct measures and support in place. Very often, there may be other underlying causes which can also be addressed with guidance.