

What Can Be Done for A Child's Short Attention Span?

Whether a child has been diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder) or just has a hard time with inattention and distractibility, life at school and at home can be pretty challenging. Adults, who respect and allow for this child's special needs, can help the child's life run more smoothly and with less stress.

Children want to please their parents and teachers and will be as attentive as they are can be at the moment. However, children with a short attention span are often criticized and punished for their inattention and resulting mistakes, which can lead to unnecessary feelings of shame, depression and resentment. If you find your child's inattentive behavior to be annoying or detrimental to the child, the following suggestions can be helpful.

- **Look your child in the eye, when giving instructions.** Give only one or two directions at a time. Ask your child to review aloud what you said to check for misunderstanding and to assist your child's memory.
- **Establish a daily routine with meals, family activities and bedtime scheduled at the same time every day.** Routines are very important for those with a short attention span.
- **Give your distractible child a specific time and place to do homework away from noise (TV, people talking) and sights (toys, active people).** Equip the space with paper & pencils. If there is no homework, have your child do leisure reading.
- **Keep study time for any subject short – 10 to 15 minutes.** Move to another subject and then go back to the first. Give breaks to move around, do jumping jacks, and get a drink. Boredom comes quickly with these kids.
- **Allow movement during study time to stimulate the attention area of the brain.** Sitting on an exercise ball or rocking chair, chewing gum, standing, jiggling, squeezing a soft ball or chewing on a rubbery item can help.
- **Have completed homework go into a special folder or portion of a 3-ring binder.** Ask your child's teacher to help by alerting your child, when homework is being handed in. Ask the teacher to check each day to see if your child has written down homework assignments.
- **Use a timer for homework, bedtime, stopping play and getting ready activities.** A timer helps children stick to their task and to speed up their efforts.
- **Have family meetings to allow everyone to set discuss and set rules for chores and recurring problems.** Set up consequences that fit the situation if the rules are not followed, or make a list of consequences from which the child can choose at the time of the error. Children feel motivated to follow rules they help set.
- **Put a poster in the bedroom with the daily routine. 1) Eat breakfast 2) Shower 3) Brush teeth 4) Get dressed.** Try this poster: Items to Take to School. 1) Lunch money 2) Homework 3) Books. Use pictures for nonreader. Fostering independence goes a long way to boost self confidence.

- **Point out positive behavior frequently** – “I noticed that you waited patiently to talk to me, while I was speaking to your brother”, “I saw you pick up your toys as soon as I asked you!” You can celebrate by giving your child a high five, a hug, or a treat – “That deserves a high five.”
- **Avoid blame and ridicule for mistakes or broken rules.** They crush a child’s spirit. Ignore little mistakes. Have a two-way discussion about bigger issues. **1)** Tell your child something positive you’ve noticed; **2)** State without shaming the problem you noticed; **2)** Ask what your child noticed, and listen; **3)** Ask what can be done about the problem and listen; **4)** Add your ideas if necessary; **5)** Both of you agree on a solution or consequence.
- **Agree on chores that your child can do daily that are age appropriate.** Even very young children can help set the table for meals and clear a few things. Children feel good about helping, and fidgety children need to move.
- **Give your child positive time with you each day.** Look at family photos and talk about happy times. Read aloud at bedtime, sing songs, play games, bake, do activities outdoors or pretend with your child.
- **Keep TV, computer & video game time short.** Research shows that these activities create attention problems.
- **Look into auditory training with specially modified music to improve your child’s attention span.** The music stimulates the area of the brain that helps people concentrate and have a longer attentive span. It also fosters improvements in listening ability, thinking, memory, academic learning, reading, social skills, mood, sensory integration and communication skills.

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