

What can be done to help children with attention problems in the classroom?

(From Contemporary Pediatrics, Dec 1994)

Memory and attention

- Seating the child close to the teacher
- Keeping oral instructions brief and giving them more than once
- Providing written directions (when a report is due, or the steps in a math problem, for example)
- Walking the child through assignments, to make sure that he or she understands the task
- Breaking up tasks and homework into small steps
- Using visual aids
- Teaching active reading (underlining), active listening (note taking), and reading for detail
- Providing remedial help in short sessions
- Teaching subvocalization (whispering) as an aid in memorizing lists (spelling words, for instance)

Impulse control

- Reminding the child to slow down, especially in multiple choice tests
- Teaching the child to monitor the quality of work before turning it in

Classroom atmosphere

- Providing a structured classroom, in which expectations for when and how tasks are to be done are clear and known in advance
- Imposing moderate but consistent discipline, with consequences for unacceptable behavior clearly stated
- Relying on positive reinforcement of good behavior rather than negative sanctions

Organizational skills

- Establishing a daily checklist of tasks
- Listing homework assignments in a special notebook, with the due date and the necessary resources (library books or art supplies, for example)
- Following up on homework assignments that are not turned in

Productivity problems

- Dividing work sheets into sections
- Reducing the amount of homework and written classwork
- Cutting down on the number of math problems that must be completed, especially if the child knows how to do them accurately

Written expression

- Giving extra time to complete written tests and assignments
- Providing special help with handwriting
- Allowing child to dictate reports, take tests orally
- Reducing the quantity of written work child is expected to produce
- Not marking written work down for untidiness, spelling errors, or poor handwriting

Self-esteem

- Rewarding progress, even if actual achievement does not meet standard requirements
- Encouraging performance in the child's areas of strength (artwork, music, athletics, or drama, for example)
- Avoiding humiliation. Child is not asked to perform tasks he finds difficult (writing on the blackboard, for example) in front of others, or to have his papers graded by other students
- Giving hand signals only the child can see, as private reminders of appropriate behavior

Social relationships

- Providing feedback about behavior in situations involving other children
- Making sure classmates do not feel the child is "getting away with" less work or worse behavior, by making modifications available to all the children if necessary

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