

STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH *Sensory Challenges*

SENSORY CHALLENGE: ATTENTION & CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

2. POOR FOCUS/INATTENTION

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INSTRUCTIONS:

The Does Your Child? Section offers educational information about characteristics of children with the above mentioned sensory/behavior challenge. Your child may present with one or many of these characteristics.

The Try This! Section offers simple strategies for helping your child cooperate and develop skills. Not all suggestions are appropriate for every child and family. Only use strategies that apply to your child's age, developmental level, and situation. It is suggested to use this checklist while consulting with a professional who has explained and is monitoring these strategies.

>>> DOES YOUR CHILD?

- Appear "unmotivated" or "lazy."
- Appear uninterested in his/her environment.
- Need extra support and encouragement to get "involved" and/or to notice things.
- Have a short attention span and/or appear bored.
- Seem to "day dream" a lot.
- Appear easily over-aroused and appear "hyper-active" or "impulsive."
- Appear easily distracted by various things in his environment.
- Move quickly from one activity to another. Your child may need extra support and encouragement to keep from "noticing everything" and stay focused on one thing at a time.
- Run throughout the house/classroom.

>>> TRY THIS!

SENSORY INPUT TO THE MOUTH – Sensory input to your child's mouth can increase attention and focus.

- Offer a crunchy snack, it can help organize a child and increase his attention span.
- Offer a thick liquid to suck through a straw, it can help organize a child and increase his attention span.
- Offer chewing gum. Chewing helps promote concentration.
- Offer a hot or sour taste such as "Fireballs, lemon "Sour Patch Kids", or "Hot Tamales."
- Cool or cold tastes can help alert a child that seems uninterested or passive. Lemon ice or ice chips are examples.

LARGE MOTOR PLAY – Regular opportunities for large motor play that provides vestibular sensory input will improve a child's potential for being attentive. Try the following:

- Try to schedule time for out-door play each day. At the very least take your child out for a walk.
- Allow child to jump up and down on an old cushion, mini-trampoline, or hold his/her hands while your child jumps up and down.
- Pull/push a wagon, go up/down a slide, jump over a small obstacle, and walk on a balance beam.
- Encourage him/her to stand facing a wall, just about his arm's length away. Have your child place his/hands on the wall, keep his feet stable, then slowly bend and straighten his/her elbows to perform "wall push-ups."

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2. POOR FOCUS/INATTENTION

>>> TRY THIS!

INTERACT WITH THE CHILD – Change how you interact with your child to help capture his/her attention.

- Change the volume and/or tempo of your voice when speaking to him. For example, try the following on an intermittent basis: whisper into his ear, use a “sing-song” voice, or use a stern “matter of fact” voice.
- Bend or squat down to make direct eye-contact with him when interacting with your child.
- A gentle touch to your child’s hand, forearm or shoulder may just enough to help gain his attention.
- To encourage your child to perform less desirable tasks, set up situations where he can have what he/she wants after he performs a less desirable activity. For example, “You can play on the computer after you put the blocks away,” or “We can read a bedtime story after you brush your teeth.”

MODIFY THE ENVIRONMENT – Modify your child’s environment to help him/her focus. Try the following:

- Examine your child’s play area and draw a map of the rooms of the house. Identify alleyways. Rearrange furniture to create obstacles for your child thus reducing his ability to gain speed running through the house.
- Reduce objects on the tabletops and walls.
- Reduce background noise (ex: leaving the television on all day).
- Limit the type of toys that he can access each day by periodically rotating the toys. This type of novelty will help capture his attention.
- Reduce/increase the number of toys/activities available to your child; include some that are slightly below your child’s ability level, some at your child’s ability level, and some slightly above your child’s ability level.
- To help your child focus, minimize the visual clutter in his play area. To do so teach your child that there is a place for each toy and expect him/her to clean up periodically before using new toys.
- Provide child-sized table and chairs.
- Have a table area where he/she is encouraged to use puzzles, color or do other table-top play.
- Provide a “Quiet Corner” where he can go to withdraw and settle down to do “quiet-play” such as looking at books. Examples of a “Quiet Corner”: small tent, small table with a blanket over the top, or a large refrigerator box.
- Learning takes place through imitation. Increase your child’s attention by improving his/her physical imitation skills. Try the following:
 - When your child does something silly, make a game out of it by copying his behavior. Try to keep the cycle of copying your child for at least three times.
 - When it seem like you have engaged him/her, add one component to the sequence to lengthen it. Again, try to keep that cycle going for at least 3 times.
 - Continue adding a component as long as your child maintains interest.