

How to Help Attention and Memory

The following suggestions are meant to be helpful in the home, but these techniques are also useful in the classroom.

- For very young children, put out only one or two toys to play with at a time. This will decrease distractibility and the tendency to move quickly from toy to toy.
- Make sure your child is looking at you when instructions are given. Hold his chin lightly or remind the child to look at you before you give the instruction. This ensures that your child's attention is focused on you and increases the likelihood that instructions will be processed.
- Enroll your child in a nursery school or a daycare program with a well structured nursery program at three years of age. This will improve your child's social skills and help him to learn routines and how to pay attention during group activities.
- Break complicated instructions down into smaller chunks. This reduces the amount the child has to remember at one time.
- Have your child repeat instructions immediately after hearing them. Tell him "Go get your coat, mitts and boots." "What are you going to do?" This lets you check to see if your child has understood what to do. If he cannot repeat the instructions back, he has not understood or he has forgotten the instructions.
- Teach your child to rehearse the instructions he hears. Begin by having him say the instructions out loud; as he improves, he can whisper or say the instructions mentally. This keeps the information from fading too quickly from memory.
- Demonstrate how to complete a new task. Then have your child do it while you watch. Walking the child through examples shows him the exact sequence of steps to follow.
- Play memory games: give sequences of actions or words to remember. Attach each action or word to an object. For example, put out three blocks: tap each block as you say each action. Point to the block as your child does the sequence.
- Teach your child how to chunk words to be remembered: "fox, goat, cat, and zebra are all animals."
- For children who can read, write out the steps in the task. For children who cannot read, draw pictures or take photographs to remind them of routines or procedures. Then if your child forgets the sequence of steps, he has something to refer back to.
- Explain reasons for doing a task in a particular order. The child may forget critical steps because he does not know why they are needed.
- Show your child the finished product before he begins. This lets the child know what he is trying to accomplish.
- Break the work into smaller amounts by folding the page in half, or covering up part of the page with another blank page. This reduces what has to be attended to at one time.
- When learning something in a rote manner, teach only a small part at one time. Add on successive pieces once the earlier ones are learned.
- Use a timer to keep the child working. Set manageable amounts of on-task time, for example, five to 10 minutes and give frequent breaks. Setting the timer makes the passage of time more concrete. Giving rest breaks reduces the chance for lapses in attention.

