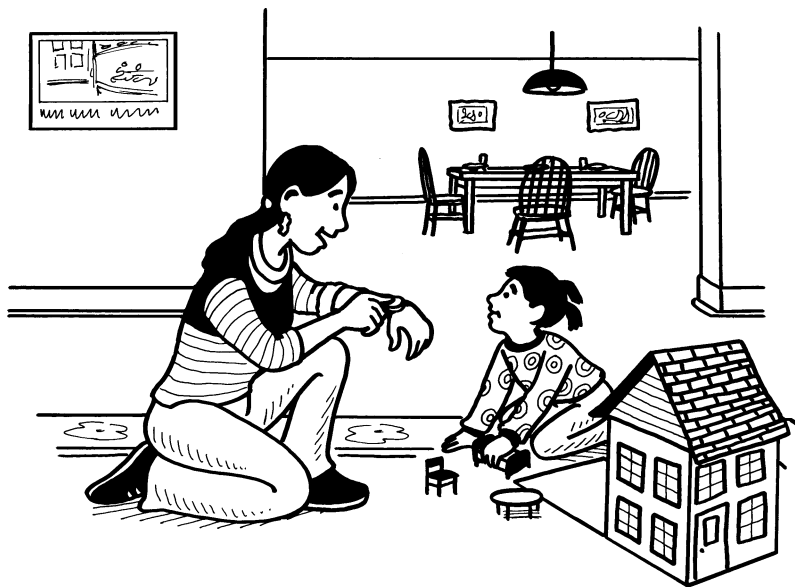


Attention, Please

Listening, following directions, concentrating on a task—all of these are important skills your child needs in school and at home. But as a parent, you know it's not always easy for your youngster to settle down and focus. Use this guide to help her pay better attention.



1 Get your child's attention

You want your youngster to pay attention to you. But first, you have to get her attention. Here are friendly ways to encourage your child to tune in to what you say—and you won't even have to raise your voice!

- Touching your youngster on the shoulder, hugging her, or holding her on your lap are all gentle ways to get her attention.
- Get down on your child's level. Kneel or sit beside her, and make eye contact.
- When you need your youngster to listen, it may help to turn off distractions, such as TV or music.
- If you know your child will have to sit and pay attention for a period of time, try to let her burn off energy beforehand. Getting enough physical activity can improve her attention span.

Tip: Research shows that parents who listen to their children are more apt to have children who listen to them. Next time you're riding in the car with your youngster, ask, "What are you thinking about?" Then listen, and talk about what she tells you.



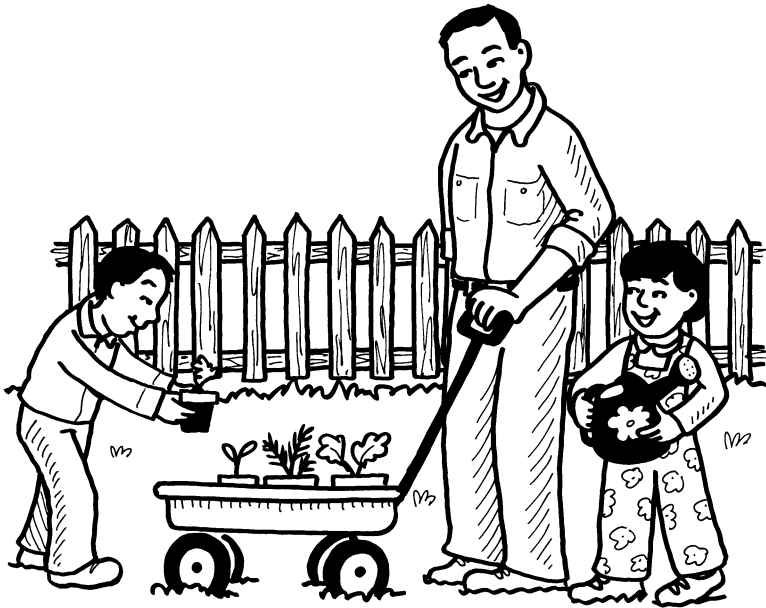
2 Know how your youngster learns best

If you hand your child a toy he hasn't seen before, what will he usually do first? The way he reacts might tell you something about the way he learns. You can use that to help him focus more easily.



- Some youngsters pay more attention to what they see. Showing your child what you expect of him can be a helpful reminder. Try cutting out or drawing a picture of a youngster putting away his clothes or making a bed. Or act out what you want him to do. *Example:* Pretend to pick up clothes and put them away.
- Does your child focus more through his sense of hearing? If so, talk to him about what he should do. ("We're going to put on our shoes and jackets now so we're on time for practice.") Or you could have him set an alarm to remind him to get ready.
- Youngsters who like to move and touch things may find it difficult to sit still for long. They might prefer standing, sitting in a rocking chair, or lying on the floor during story time, for instance. Hands-on books, such as pop-ups and scratch 'n' sniff stories, are fun for the child who wants to feel things.

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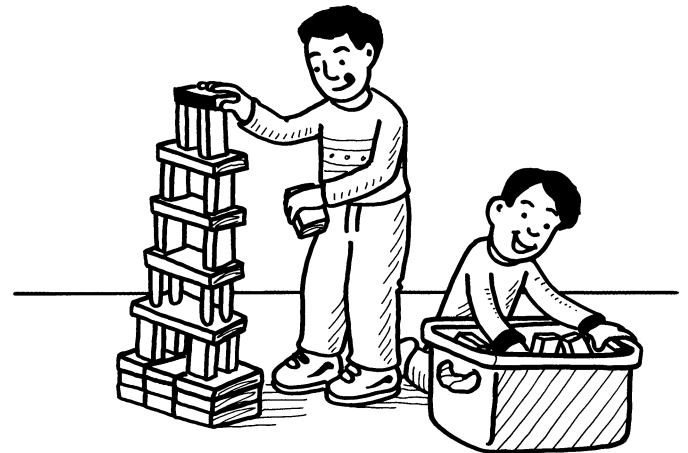


- Does your child like helping you around the house? Invite her to join you in household chores and tasks—she will feel important, and you’ll be surprised by how long she’s able to stick with something. For instance, give her a small watering can, and ask her to water plants. Or have her scoop your dog’s food and fill his water bowl. Other possibilities: Let her work alongside you when you bake cookies, garden, dust furniture, wash the car, put silverware away, or wash windows.

4 Boost your youngster’s concentration

There are many opportunities throughout the day to improve your child’s ability and desire to concentrate.

- Youngsters often work more slowly than adults do. When your child is involved in an activity, such as building a tower out of blocks, try not to interrupt. His attention span will grow if you allow him to practice staying focused for longer periods of time.



- You can help your youngster settle down and stay attentive by talking to him in a quiet and low-key manner. Being matter-of-fact and speaking softly is often more effective than being overly expressive and excited.
- Praise your child for concentrating on a task. Your feedback works best when it is specific. For example, say, “You colored the whole picture!” rather than, “What a good boy!”
- If your youngster is relaxed, he’ll find it easier to focus. Try techniques to get rid of tension. Ask him to pretend to be a balloon—have him puff up by taking deep breaths and then sagging as he releases air. Or he could be a floppy rag doll, a stretching cat, or a floating feather.

3 Tap into your child’s interests

Figuring out what your youngster enjoys—and helping her focus on it—can increase her attention span.

- What activities does she like? One child may love creating with Legos, while another gets a kick out of roller skating. Maybe your youngster is interested in tumbling, doing magic tricks, or making bracelets. Encourage her hobbies—she will pay attention more easily if she cares about what she’s doing.
- Playing games is a good way to keep your child focused. Try board games and card games, or make your own. For instance, fill a shoe box with two pieces each of different materials (bubble packing sheets, felt, silk, sandpaper). Then, have your youngster close her eyes and use her sense of touch to find the ones that match. Or fill the box with “mystery” items, and ask her to guess what’s inside by feeling the shape and texture of each object. She’ll have to pay close attention to figure them out!



Early Years