

# Classroom approaches for the child with inattention and/or hyperactivity

## Consider the following:

- ◆ Position in the classroom
- ◆ Tools to do the job
- ◆ Delivery of information - VAK route
- ◆ Learning styles inventory
- ◆ Use of visual reminders
- ◆ Reinforcement
- ◆ Options for safe haven

## The most effective classrooms include:

- ◆ Structure: clear rules, routines, directions, and expectations
- ◆ Salience: use of cues, prompting, and repetition of instructions
- ◆ Consistency: in limit-setting, use of prudent feedback
- ◆ Motivation: frequent positive feedback and consequences
- ◆ Interesting lessons: that capture imagination and curiosity
- ◆ Check work before they move on to the next

## Routines

- Have routines for dealing with tasks and write them on a checklist.
- Ask the children to tick off as they complete each part.

## Relax

Allow for regular movement breaks - stretch, walk, take a message etc.

## “ ‘Ello, ‘ello...’ ”

Repeat what you say several times. This will give the drifters several chances of getting the message.

## Setting up a classroom

- Seat the pupil away from distractions.
- Close to the front of class or teacher's desk.
- By peers who are good workers.
- Away from window, pencil sharpener, mobile, door, paint drying...

## Display your classroom rules

- Then you can just point when you want to praise someone's behaviour.
- Traffic light system to indicate the acceptable noise level.
- Display the class timetable and stick to it. This will give children a chance to think about forthcoming events.
- Rules should not be “Don't...”
- Rules should say what children should do.

### **Transitions**

- Limit the time between lessons.
- Rehearse rules for these times.
- Warn children when a session is coming to an end.
- Engage pupils in activities while they are waiting for others to finish.
- Have a calm down time after breaks/lunch time etc.

### **Cut down and 'chunk' work**

- Limit the amount of work on each page to only a few problems or activities so it doesn't seem so overwhelming and cluttered.
- Cover up portions that are not needed.

### **Time and tests**

Allot extra time to complete tests and homework. They shouldn't be penalised for attention lapses or their difficulty sustaining extra effort during complex learning tasks.

### **Make use of technology**

- Allow pupils to use computers to present work.
- Allow pupils to tape record some lessons.
- Use flow charts and mind maps.
- Allow notes to be photocopied and annotated.

### **Hands on**

- Use apparatus where possible rather than always pencil and paper tasks.
- Teach maths using games and coins.
- Measuring through building something.

### **Structuring**

- Decide how long the child is able to attend.
- Create a structure to the session.
- Involve the child with the planning of the session; the child may be more motivated to attend and participate.
- Constraints on the child's behaviour may often be necessary for learning to take place.
- The child must experience success. The purpose is primarily to teach them to attend to the task, therefore initial activities must be short, simple and within their ability.
- Be consistent with your expectations and consequences for the breaking of rules.

- Teaching should proceed in small steps; gradually extend the duration and complexity of the stimuli the child is expected to attend to, and move towards a more normal environment.
- Sit beside him and engage in parallel play. Begin to extend the child's play by demonstration without interfering in what they are doing. They may respond in one of the following ways:
  - They may not appear to notice, but begin to imitate your actions.
  - They may stop their play and watch you with interest.
  - They may destroy your game.

In any case, contact has occurred and you have caught the child's attention.

- Be certain that the child can foresee an end to the task. When teaching new skills it is often hard for them to concentrate whilst the whole thing is being taught. Try to backward-chain i.e. start with the last component and work your way back. Thus the child sees an immediate end result and gets praise.

### **Verbalisation and Cueing**

- Be careful about the type and amount of verbalisation used during an activity, because sometimes it can be too distracting.
- Focus on positive behaviour, e.g. say "Look at the paper" rather than "Don't look over there".
- Keep verbal instructions brief and simple, draw attention to one feature at a time.
- Non-verbal cues can alert the child to salient features of a task, e.g. point with a finger.
- When the child can tolerate the adult and begin to imitate, small modifications to their own play can be made:
  - Push the correct puzzle in front of him
  - Add another brick to their train or tower
  - Then move towards giving simple verbal instructions immediately ahead of your actions.

### **Improving attention in the classroom**

#### **Establishing control and focus of attention**

- ◆ Present the child with the chosen activity materials and allow them a few minutes exploratory play.
- ◆ Before giving any verbal instructions, ensure the child is sitting still and not fiddling with the toys.
- ◆ Call their name, establish eye contact and deliver a short, simple instruction.
- ◆ The next step is to gain the child's attention while they are actively engaged in the task. Call their name, say "look", "listen", but don't give any instruction until you have established eye contact.
- ◆ Instructions must be related to the task.

- ◆ Remember the child may be even more absorbed in these active games and at first you may have to physically quieten him before you can get his attention. Gradually decrease the amount you have to do to gain eye contact.

### **Control**

- ◆ Keep instructions very short to begin with e.g. “copy me”, “do this”. Accompany with appropriate gestures.
- ◆ Slowly teach the child to listen and take in what you say without stopping what he is doing.
- ◆ Stand by the child without speaking until he is aware of you, and then give the instruction.
- ◆ If the child continues to look at you, encourage him to stick at what he is doing with remarks such as “don’t look up, that’s very good”. Repeat the instruction if necessary.
- ◆ Stand by the child occasionally, while commenting on his activity. He thus cannot look at you without turning around.

### **There is a need for consistency, calm and structure**

- ◆ Boundaries need to be clear. The need to know where he is sitting, and who is looking after him or her, is also important for the child. Changes in classroom and teachers will cause anxiety for the child. They need to know the plan for each day, and the need for repetition (so that e.g. each Monday is the same) is important.
- ◆ Try to make up a timetable for the holidays as well so that there is structure there too.
- ◆ When the child first comes in at the start of the day, they need time to settle down, to allow them to feel in control. This is especially true after a busy time in the playground.
- ◆ Make sure that the child is in a good line of eye contact so that he can receive visual cues as well as auditory commands.
- ◆ Break down instructions into small bits, and repeat each stage for the child if necessary.
- ◆ Help the child to be organised – different colour pens for different parts of their work, see-through pencil cases so that they can see if they have all the contents.
- ◆ Try to sit the child next to the quieter children – noise will only stimulate the child to be noisier.
- ◆ Praise, praise and praise – they need to know that they are praised for trying, not just for doing well. Beware however that too much praise can lead to over stimulation.
- ◆ Use a timer to show how long a task will take or, set the timer to when the task should be completed by before the buzzer goes off.
- ◆ Always gain good eye contact before giving instructions. Ask the child to repeat them back to you. Don’t forget to keep the words you use to a minimum.

### **Activities to promote the transfer of attention**

Transfer to a child's classroom may be affected by:-

- ◆ Increasing amount of environmental distraction. The primary school child may be placed in a very stimulating environment.
- ◆ The large class and open layout increases the number of people present in a given situation.
- ◆ Attention control work can be carried out in a small group after one-to-one has been successful. Initially it may be necessary to increase the help given to the child, as their attention will probably not be as good as in a one-to-one situation. The prompts can gradually be faded out.
- ◆ The child should now be able to work alongside another child doing the same activity.

### **Increase tolerance by either:-**

- ◆ Including them in a small group of children at a similar level of attention.
- ◆ Try seating the child in a partitioned area of their own, later remove the partition and have the child with their back to the class.
- ◆ Include the child in normal activities and prompt them should their attention lapse.
- ◆ Gradually fade involvement.
  - Find out what activities the child is expected to get on with by himself in class and practice these in individual sessions.