



Concentration and attention

Having good attention and concentration helps children to learn.

- **Babies and children learn most skills by practising them over and over** – tying shoelaces, writing, using scissors, or riding a bike.
- **Children need to be able to focus** on a task and practise an activity to improve their skills.
- **Learning to concentrate** and finish things helps reduce impulsive behaviour and restlessness, and be calming.

When it comes to concentration and attention:

- **babies** will pay most attention to human faces. They will smile and make happy noises if they are enjoying play. They may turn away or start to fuss if there's too much going on. Babies start developing puzzle skills by handling or putting things inside other things. At around 12 months, give your baby stacking cups, simple posting boxes, peg boards and simple puzzles.
- **toddlers** are very active and find it hard to sit still. A busy toddler might touch and knock down a tower of blocks they are exploring. Toddlers can start looking at familiar shapes and pictures – 'There's a ball, now it's your turn to find a ball'. Start using 'my turn, your turn' for simple puzzles, stacking, posting and matching games. Toddlers are only just developing self-control – remember that waiting, even for a few seconds, can be hard for toddlers.
- **young children** can sit with you, play simple board games or interlocking puzzles, enjoy card games and matching games, and can wait their turn or listen while you read a book. Be patient as your child learns to win and lose. In some situations, sitting still can be difficult, such as when children are with friends or somewhere like the park, or if they're tired, hungry or unwell.

What you can do

- **Make time for active play** and **quiet play** – allow your child to be active before sitting still.
- **Remove distractions** when your child needs to concentrate. Turn off the TV and find a quiet, uncluttered space. Screen time is not recommended for children younger than 2 years. Children aged 2 to 5 years should have no more than one hour of screen time per day.
- **Set the scene to encourage concentration** – sit together on the floor or at a small table, sit face-to-face.
- Offer **simple choices** – begin with short tasks that are easy to finish, and set clear goals – 'Do this five times'.
- **Watch, notice** and **praise** with describing words – 'That was good listening to the story'. Even if a task is unfinished, praise your child for having a go.
- **Offer time for brief breaks** in between activities.
- Children often concentrate better on **activities they enjoy** – what does your child like to do? What activities will get their attention?
- **Make sure games and puzzles are the right level** – not so difficult that your child gives up, but not so easy that they get bored. You can make most games and puzzles easier or harder by changing the rules or giving more help to complete.

Some activities to try



Puzzles and games:

Jigsaw puzzles, matching games and board games are a great way to develop **attention, concentration and thinking skills** – recognising, remembering, matching, sorting, and problem solving.

Puzzles and games develop

- **language skills** – listen and follow instructions, talk about what you're doing
- **hand skills** – roll dice, move counters, place puzzle pieces
- **social skills** – take turns, play games with rules, win and lose
- **looking skills.**

Use puzzles and games as a chance to spend quality time together, talking and **having fun**.

For younger children, choose puzzles with big knobs to hold.

Encourage your child to sometimes **play with puzzles by themselves**.

Give **simple clues** to help – 'I wonder where the next piece goes?'

Borrow puzzles and games from your toy library, swap with friends or rotate them.

Make your own puzzles, matching cards or picture bingo using old photos and magazines, or simple shape puzzles using biscuit cutters.



Keeping your child safe

- Supervise your child closely at all times, especially around water, play equipment, or when using objects such as scissors, pencils, glue or paint. Avoid flammable or toxic materials.
- Babies, toddlers and young children can choke on small toys and objects.
- Children who are easily distracted and impulsive don't stop to think before acting. They may need closer supervision than other children, especially near hazards such as water, stoves, scissors, heights, and roads.

Find out more

For more information on play, learning, and a range of other topics, visit:

- www.healthywa.gov.au
- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- www.bringingupgreatkids.org

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