



Techniques to Develop Concentration Skills in Primary Age Students

A. Check in

This is a simple but essential component of any group that seeks to be supportive. Each member of the group takes their turn to report on their week. Instigate this by asking an age appropriate question such as, "Has anybody got any news" or "How have things been". For instance, a child may have found itself in a complex situation. The group will help problem solve and find a better way of managing the situation. If your focus is solely concentration, you will not want to get distracted by outside issues such as, "I had a fight with ...". The level of trust the children will develop in you is very high and they may take a chance with you and tell you things they wouldn't tell others.

B. Coloring Activity

The children need to be seated around a table. Give them a page with some very small circles on, they will be expected to color them in. Tell the children that you want them to do the task for ten seconds at first, but you will be building this up over time. At the end of the set period, give the children a break for thirty seconds or so. Encourage them to have a wiggle and to shake out the tension. The

expected behaviors when on task are: bottom on seat, head bowed, pencil in hand, pencil moving. The pattern will look like this:

- 10 seconds coloring
30 seconds shake out the tension/ look out of the window/talk etc.
- 10 seconds coloring
30 seconds shake out the tension/ look out of the window/talk etc.
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- 10 seconds coloring
30 seconds shake out the tension/ look out of the window/talk etc.

and so on until you feel that you can extend the time on task.

As the children are working gently, praise and encourage. As the session/s move on, go onto larger circles and then to conventional pre-drawn pictures. There is a difference between time on task with praise and encouragement and time on task without. Be very aware of this and be lavish with praise when you ratchet up the time on task. The point at which you should ratchet up the on time task is when the children can stay on task **without** praise and encouragement. Once the children can stay on task for a couple of minutes, move onto the children doing their own drawing and coloring it.

C. Copying Activity

Once the children have become successful at coloring and drawing for ten minutes, move them onto copying. Do this in the same way that you did with coloring. Though copying is bad practice, it takes less cognitive resources than free writing.

Once the children have got up to a ten-minute period of on task behavior, take out a bunch of keys and rattle them as you walk around the group. Praise them for staying on task. If they look up make a joke of it along the lines of, "Got you!"

When the children have got accustomed to working with the keys, find other ways to try and distract them. "Would you like a piece of chocolate" is a good one.

Once they have got this far, you may leave the room and stand outside the door just outside the children's vision. The time to re enter is when you sense they are becoming restless. They usually move before they talk which you will hear.

D. Class work activity

This is simply the final stage of this program. The children are given class work to do in the group. They must be able to do this work without assistance.

E. Activity Swapping

This game involves having a range of tabletop activities for the children to engage with, all arranged around one table. As time goes on, the number of activities increases. Start with two activities one slightly more attractive than the other, for instance a jig saw puzzle and a sand tray. Increase this to include activities

such as copying, free writing, coloring, handwriting, Lego and something really exciting such as a remote control car.

The idea here is that the children rotate activities. Thus, they may be writing while someone else is playing with the car. Again you expect the on task behaviors for pencil and paper tasks that are listed above. These need to be stressed to the children. Clearly, you need to ensure that all the children get a go of the nice activity, but the bulk of the time is spent on pencil and paper activities where they have to display the on task behaviors.

F. Praise

The very act of making an important issue of concentrating should have an effect. Praise the children regularly as a group and as individuals by mentioning that they have concentrated well, that they are becoming super sitters, etc.

G. I Remember When

The children absolutely love this game. It is rather like a parent telling their own children about the funny things that the children did when they were little. You may say something like, "... do you remember when I observed you in class and you were hiding under the table?" This is said with much mirth and fondness. This is not to say that one is condoning the behavior. What you are saying is that the behavior is so far in the past that a repetition is unthinkable now and so it is OK to laugh about it. This in itself reinforces the extinguishing of the behavior, because they would really let you down if it ever reappeared.