

## Grab Their Attention: 11 Ways to Help Kids Get Focused and Stay Focused

Kids are doing a lot of multitasking these days—from surfing the Web to texting, instant messaging and listening to their iPods®—constant distractions compete for their attention. With so many potential interruptions, it can be difficult for children to stop and focus on the task at hand. Yet, helping children develop self-discipline, effective focus strategies and concentration skills at an early age is a basis for long-term success in high school, college and the professional working world. Here are some practical and manageable tips parents can use to help their children focus, complete their homework and ultimately succeed.

### **1. Set Expectations Early**

Explain to your children that just as you have many important responsibilities (at home, at work, in your community, etc.), learning is their most important "job" right now. The earlier you set your expectations and establish a routine for learning, homework and studying, the easier it will be to maintain. Make it a family practice: Allow older children to set an example for younger children—include younger children in homework and study hour by having them quietly color, look at books or do some other learning activity during this time.

### **2. Manage Distractions**

Although eliminating every possible distraction is nearly impossible, there are ways to manage and minimize the number of things that can pull a child's focus away. Start with technology: no television, phone or computer until homework is done. Total silence isn't required, because research has found that certain types of music help people concentrate better, especially classical and instrumental music. If your child is interested in listening to music, consider playing Bach, Mozart or Beethoven.

### **3. Establish Rules for Homework Time**

There is nothing more distracting than a knock on the door and an invitation to play when it's homework time. Require that your children's homework and studying be completed (neatly and correctly) before going out to play. This can be hard in the summer, when other children are off from school at different times. As seasons and activities change throughout the year, be flexible and adapt to changing schedules.

### **4. You Do Homework Too (including reading time)**

If possible, take this time to quietly do your own "homework." This might be work you brought home with you, reading you need to catch up on or sorting through mail and bills. Your children will be more focused if they see you setting a similar example. Though it may be difficult, try to be disciplined about your own use of computers and phones during this time. During homework and study time, think of your home as a library and do all you can to make it a place that fosters focus and limits distraction.

## **5. Set a Place**

Create a designated place in your home for independent study. This space should have a table or desk with plenty of room for books and papers and should have all homework supplies readily available. Keep a few extra supplies on hand to avoid those last-minute, late-night dashes to the store for printer paper, poster board, paint, etc.

Also, try to establish this space in a quiet, low-traffic area of your home where distractions can be managed and minimized. Keep the area conducive to study by ensuring it is well lighted and ventilated. If you have more than one child and they can work together quietly—great! But realistically, you may need to create a separate area for each child.

## **6. No Texting**

As adults, we know how text messages and emails can interrupt our own concentration. Let your children know they cannot read text messages or use their cell phones during study time or homework hour. If there are questions related to the assignment that you cannot answer, allow them to make a brief phone call (monitored by you, of course)!

## **7. Rewards**

Rewards can be controversial because they can easily become bribes. But the fact is, human beings respond to positive reinforcement. If you think a positive reward system will work to help motivate your children, avoid material, monetary or food rewards. Instead, negotiate the rewards based on spending quality time together. Ask your children to think of things they would like to do with you, and then make that a monthly goal.

Create a homework chart or download a free, printable chart online. For each homework assignment completed neatly, in a timely manner and without complaint, your child gets a star. These stars could then add up to an end-of-the-month treat: a new book, a trip to the park or museum, a bike ride or a family movie night.

## **8. Praise and Positivity**

Even with the best intentions and optimal study conditions, getting children to settle down and focus can be challenging, especially if they have difficulties with concentration and attention. But with practice, patience, persistence and positivity, a good routine can be established within a month. Remember to use positive reinforcement and verbal praise, because negativity and punishments only make children feel worse and do not motivate them to try harder. Offer specific praise to children that highlights their progress—not just results—such as "I'm proud of you for completing your math worksheets and for getting to the next level" versus a general "Good job!" Don't forget to also praise the child's progress and not just the end result.

## **9. Communication**

Be sure to communicate homework guidelines to after-school caregivers so they can create a consistent, positive and focus-friendly work zone. Create a written list that after-school caregivers can follow that details your expectations, from the quiet, distraction-free environment to the amount of time that should be allotted for homework and study time. Even if you are not home while your children are doing their

homework—take time to check it and let them know you are engaged.

### **10. Work With Teachers and Instructors**

Partner with teachers, instructors and tutors for advice and support. They may have insights, observations and suggestions you haven't considered. Be open to trying new ideas. Work together to establish short- and long-term manageable goals, expectations for improvement and progress.

### **11. Learn What Work Style Works**

Children need to see and understand the value of study, but remember that people have different ways of learning and processing information. Make it a collaborative effort to find the methods that work best for their study style. Some children may work better if they are able to walk around and think out loud. Some children do better lying on the floor with their books spread around them. Others need quiet, stillness and structure. As long as they are making good progress, be flexible about what works for them.

Being able to focus, concentrate and maintain good study habits are life skills that will set your children up for success in all aspects of their lives—from the baseball field to the stage. It's not just about completing assignments, it's about establishing self-discipline and perseverance that will give them the ability and confidence to pursue goals, manage setbacks and know what it takes to achieve.

Read more: <http://www.oprah.com/relationships/how-to-help-kids-get-focused-and-stay-focused-back-to-school#ixzz4MGGuEiA6>