

ATTENTION

Overview

Attention looks at how young people focus, switch or sustain attention. Attention may 'zoom in' very deeply on interests or shift quickly away from tasks that feel less engaging. Distraction is not lack of effort- it reflects brain differences in attention pathways.

Attention is about how well you can **focus, switch tasks, and stay on track**. For neurodiverse young people, this can feel tricky because your brain might be busy noticing lots of things at once or struggling to filter distractions.

It's not about being "bad at concentrating" — it's about having a brain that processes the world differently.

Impact on neurodiverse young people

Neurodiverse young people (including those with ADHD, autism, and other conditions) may experience challenges with attention due to differences in executive functioning—skills like working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. These difficulties can make it harder to:

- Sustain focus on tasks.
- Shift attention between activities.
- Filter out distractions.
- Manage impulses and emotional responses.

Factors influencing attention include sensory processing differences, environmental distractions, and neurological variations. These challenges are not deficits—they reflect diverse ways of thinking and learning.

Academic difficulties: Trouble focusing in class, completing tasks, or following instructions.

- Lessons may feel too long or too fast.
- Homework can seem overwhelming.
- Instructions might be hard to follow if they're not clear or broken down.

Social challenges: Misunderstandings with peers due to distractibility or impulsivity.

- You might interrupt without meaning to.
- You could drift off in conversations or miss social cues.

Emotional wellbeing: Frustration, low self-esteem, or anxiety when attention struggles are misunderstood.

- Feeling frustrated when you can't focus.
- Worrying you're "not good enough."
- Getting anxious when people don't understand your attention style.

Long-term risks: Without support, young people may face exclusion from school or higher risk of mental health difficulties.

Benefits of Supporting Attention

- **Improved learning outcomes:** Consistent strategies help young people engage better in lessons. With the right tools, focusing gets easier and school feels less stressful.
- **Stronger relationships:** Parents and teachers who understand attention differences foster trust and confidence. **When teachers and parents get your needs, you feel more capable.**
- **Reduced stress:** Supportive environments lower frustration for both young person and their family.
- **Celebrating strengths:** Many neurodiverse young people are creative, curious, and great problem-solvers — support helps those talents stand out.

Practical Strategies to Support Attention

Structure and Predictability

- Use visual schedules and clear routines to reduce anxiety and improve focus.
- Break tasks into short, manageable chunks with clear start and end points.
- **Make routines your friend:** Having a plan for the day helps your brain know what's coming.
- **Visual reminders:** Use sticky notes, apps, or charts to keep track of what's next.

Sensory-Friendly Environment

- Minimise visual and auditory distractions.
- Consider use of sensory tools (fidget toys, noise-canceling headphones).
- Offer movement breaks or "brain breaks" to regulate energy.
- **Move your body:** Short breaks with stretching, walking, or dancing can reset your focus.

Attention Techniques

- Pomodoro Method: 25 minutes of work followed by a 5-minute break.
- Use timers for clear work periods.
- Allow strategic seating away from distractions.
- **Ask for help:** Tell teachers or parents what works best for you (like shorter instructions or quiet spaces).
- **Find your focus style:** Some people work better with music, others need silence — experiment to see what helps.

Positive Reinforcement

- Praise effort and progress, not just outcomes.
- Offer choices to give children a sense of control.
- **Reward yourself:** Celebrate small wins — finishing a page of homework deserves a high-five.

RESOURCES

[Attention and Concentration Information Sheet](#) for Education

[Attention & Listening – Childrens SSLT](#)

[Strategies for supporting attention, activity, emotions and behaviour](#)

[Berkshire Healthcare – Supporting Attention, Activity, Emotions and Behaviour](#) – Practical strategies for parents and schools.

[Words Matter – Talking to Neurodivergent Children](#) – Guidance on communication and executive functioning.

[Children’s Society – Celebrating Neurodiversity](#) – Stories and advice for young people.

[Berkshire Healthcare – Tips for Attention & Behaviour](#) – Practical strategies explained simply.

[Words Matter – Talking to Neurodivergent Young People](#) – Helpful guide on communication and self-understanding.

youngminds.org.uk - Support and advice for mental health and attention difficulties.

Apps & Digital Tools

- **Forest** – A gamified focus timer where you grow virtual trees by staying off your phone.
- **Focus@Will** – Music scientifically designed to improve concentration and reduce distractions.
- **Todoist** – A task manager that helps break big projects into smaller steps with reminders.
- **MindMeister** – A visual mind-mapping tool for organising ideas and tasks in a creative way.
- **Headspace** – Guided mindfulness and breathing exercises to reset attention and reduce stress.
- **Pomofocus** – A simple online Pomodoro timer (25 minutes focus, 5 minutes break) to train attention.
- **Habitica** – Turns daily routines and tasks into a role-playing game, rewarding you for completing goals.