

Attention Checklist

People with attention difficulties often have trouble concentrating on a task for long periods of time. They tend to be easily distracted (especially when other things are happening around them). They may also have trouble dividing their attention between two or more tasks at the same time (“multi-tasking”).

Some of the following could indicate problems with attention and concentration

- can't learn a phone number long enough to call it
- can't repeat the last 5 digits of a number
- can't repeat a 4 or 5 digit number backwards
- loses track of time
- can't concentrate enough to read
- seems easily distracted
- often complains of being bored
- interrupts others during conversations
- tries to do too many things at once
- seems absent minded
- quits doing things quickly
- seems to get confused easily
- seems to have trouble learning simple things
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Remember that this list can also point out a person's strengths
Support strengths rather than focussing only on problems or it can be very
disheartening!

Helping with Attention Problems

Match the task and information to the attention span

That means keeping things:

Direct

Brief in time

Limited in amount

Focus on one thing at a time

Don't expect someone with attention problems to be good at Multi-tasking (imagine the cognitive tasks involved in being a waiter). Minimize having to pay attention to many things at the same time

Make paying attention more interesting

The way a message is delivered makes a difference. It is easier to attend to something that is exciting, and delivered with enthusiasm and pep rather than to a boring, soft and disinterested presentation. Variety helps so that could mean changing your rate of speech, tone and loudness during a session.

Similarly, the more content is seen as interesting, exciting and relevant, the easier it is to sustain attention.

Take breaks

Rest allows for consolidation. Rest prevents overwhelming a person's limited capacities to process. Rest respects the fact that if you struggle with anything (be it mental or physical), it is tiring.

Cues and Reminders

Self-talk, a touch or look from someone, a visual reminder, feedback etc. These can help focus attention and bring it back when it falters

Is the environment helpful or too distracting?

Simplify the environment by removing distractors.

Consider learning style and try to arrange circumstances to fit it – this might involve adding something (e.g. like soft music or something to fiddle with)

Mix it Up

Vary the content or setting of the information or task

Split a session into physical, intellectual and social sections