

Games to Enhance Attention Regulation

by John Hoffman

We often think of the ability to focus attention as a skill that some children have and others lack. Actually, focused attention is a learned skill, one that comes more easily to some children than to others. If your child is one of those for whom attention skills do not come easily, it's worth knowing that many childhood games and activities can help children strengthen their ability to sustain attention.

Games like Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, I Spy, and 20 Questions require children to sustain attention and focus on the instructions or guidance of a leader or partner.

Make-believe play, which is very popular with preschoolers but continues into the school-age years, requires children to stay in character and focus on the developing story line.

All kinds of games require sustained attention. This includes classic board games like Monopoly or Clue and card games like Fish or Crazy Eights. Some video games, especially those that involve role-playing, solving riddles, or completing a quest exercise attention and concentration as well.

Group activities and sports require children to focus their attention on instructors or coaches, follow rules, and concentrate on what they are doing. This includes everything from karate, hockey, and gymnastics to piano lessons and drama classes.

Colouring, painting, and crafts exercise all sorts of abilities, especially hand-eye coordination and fine motor control, but they also require attention to planning and detail.

Storytelling also requires sustained attention. Reading stories to children exercises attention to some extent. But if it's a picture book, the pictures make it easier for children to keep their attention. If children simply listen to a story, without pictures, their ability to focus attention gets a better workout.