

Ways to Engage Children's Attention

by John Hoffman

Being able to focus one's attention is a crucial skill for success in school and ultimately in life. One way children learn this skill is by focusing their attention on parents. And, of course, parents want and need children to focus their attention on them at various times. Here how you can help your child to sustain his or her attention.

Make it fun. Humour and fun are great attention-getters and attention-keepers with children.

Reduce distractions. This one might seem obvious. But there are an increasing number of distractions in today's world, including all sorts of electronic devices, and the multi-tasking many busy parents must do. If you really need your child's attention, turn off the TV, computer, or music device and turn off your own cell phone and stop whatever task you are doing at the moment. If having your child's attention is really important, take her into a room for an uninterrupted one-on-one conversation. Not only will this help her to focus her attention, it also sets a good example about how to reduce distractions.

Give them an active role. Children focus their attention more easily when they are interested and they are more likely to be interested when they feel a sense of ownership in the activity. One way to achieve this is to give them an active role. So, if for example, you want you child to cooperate while you're planning a trip to the grocery store, involve him in planning the shopping list and give him jobs such as finding specific products while at the store.

Talk about their interests. We often want children to focus their attention on things that are important to us. That's part of our job as parents. But talking to children about their own interests—even if they don't seem that important to us—is a good way to have conversations that sustain children's attention.