

## Teaching your child to sit and focus

Many children with autism, sensory processing disorder or ADHD have difficulty sitting down during work or learning time. However, it's a very important skill to develop, not just to enable a child to learn but also to develop the social skills to enjoy life experiences such as going to a restaurant.

### How then do we teach sitting behaviour and better concentration skills?

To begin, engage with the child and build a rapport. Play with the child at a place they favour, for example, on the floor. Gradually lead them to the table to play, taking the toy with you that they are playing with. At this point, the objective is for them to initially sit to the table, so after rewarding with the motivator, allow the child to move when they choose.

Use a motivator to re-engage and encourage the child to return and sit to the table. A motivator is a favoured toy/object that you know the child will engage with e.g. bubbles, car, soft toy. Offer the motivator but gesture for the child to sit down. Use clear, concise language, "sitting down" for instruction. When the child sits, immediately give the motivator as reward for sitting. If the child gets up, gently take the motivator saying, "my turn". Offer the motivator again. If the child reaches for it, say "sitting down" and give immediately after sitting. This may take a few sessions to secure.



Bubbles are a good motivator

Gradually introduce short, simple and achievable tasks to be done at the table. This could be a short posting activity, inset jigsaw or pop up toy for example. Initially, complete one task then say, "finished" and encourage the child to go off and play.



In our experience it is preferable to use resources that have a clear finish, (for example when all the shapes are posted the task is finished).

Slowly increase the time spent at the table by adding extra activities; but pay close attention for signs of it starting to become too much for the child. If this happens; end

the activity by saying “finished” at a suitable point, before the child takes themselves away.

In addition, you could use visual aids with symbols of the activity to show what they need to do and when the task is finished. Remove the symbol after each activity has finished and say “finished”. This provides structure and enables the child to understand and anticipate when they are going to get a break.



A visual aid supports structure and understanding

Or as an alternative; have a start and finish tray with the activities moving from the start tray to the finish tray after each task is completed. Saying “finished” as each activity goes into the tray will support understanding.



Alternatively, a start and finish box can be used to support understanding what is expected of them

Knowing when they are going to get a break will help the child to better regulate their emotional responses. To move on to the next level, at first signs of fatigue say, “one more, then finished” This allows the child to take a break, but you are extending and controlling the end of the activity.

Using fun, enjoyable and achievable activities will make learning to sit easier and quicker; as the child will want to sit down by choice. There will still be times when they need more prompting and it may be necessary to go back a step and use a motivator.

You will be amazed and impressed at how much your child can achieve if you take the process of learning at a suitable pace, and gradually make sitting down and focusing more natural. Patience and understanding are the key to teaching children skills that may be second nature to us, but not to your child.

Remember to incorporate movement breaks or a sensory diet between sessions to regulate and reset the body.