

## A10 – Learning to attend

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Developing the ability to focus and attend to a particular activity or instruction, while other distractions are going on around the room, is essential to learn new skills.

**Learning to attend aim:** to assist with developing eye-hand coordination, fine motor skills, pre-writing and increased independence in self-led play and conceptual development.

### Preparation and resources

Additional adult support is likely to be required to assist with increasing tolerance and acceptance of unfamiliar or new activities for sensory skill development.

- Picture prompt cards or structured timetabling are good ways to prepare the child for what is due to happen.
- Use of work trays, boxes or clear zipper bags to store appropriately graded activities such as early years scissors with paper straws or soft card or therapy putty to cut in snips or constructive matching games and puzzles.
- Prepare two to three activities initially and aim for each activity to start and finish in a short structured session such as two to three minutes per activity, to complete each once then tidy away and move on to the next activity for up to 10 minutes focused learning.
- However be prepared to allow the task to continue if the child is concentrating and as soon as their attention starts to waiver – introduce a new task
- Attach a short double loop ribbon to the zipper bag to encourage independence to open & close (prepare and tidy away) to encourage organisational skill development.

### Environmental factors

Where all possible:

- Choose a time in the day that is likely to be quieter or less busy time and when the child has no other agenda eg needs food or drink, the toilet or is at low energy state.
- Complete focused attention tasks after the child has completed a movement activity and will be in a more alert state - see postural management (A4), ball skills (A6), or using my sense of movement (A1)
- Reduce all unnecessary visual stimuli such as over cluttered desktop or a busy visual work area, with screened off area to reduce distractions from passing movement stimulus eg a busy doorway or window, facing a physical play area.
- Reduce all additional auditory sounds such as technical or mechanical noise (the fridge, radio, etc).
- Appropriate height **seating and table heights** are necessary with feet resting on the floor, to encourage upright positioning of the trunk during more focused fine motor tasks, to encourage a more attentive state.
- Try presenting visual work on a **sloped surface** to face up towards the child, for heightened visual stimulus. [www.backinaction.co.uk/posturepack](http://www.backinaction.co.uk/posturepack) or [www.specialdirect.com](http://www.specialdirect.com)
- Use of a **weighted lap pad or weighted vest** may assist with extending sitting tolerance up to and beyond three minutes participation in tasks. See website leaflet from [www.sensorydirect.com](http://www.sensorydirect.com) or seek advice from a Professional.

## Activity guidelines

- Introduce the activities at a graded level, within the child's individual level of tolerance and achievement, with fun motivating (multisensory) aspects.
- Provide simple instruction such as "John sit down" with a physical prompt to touch the chair or **Makaton sign to sit**. Reward good sitting immediately with start of the activity
- Demonstrate new/unfamiliar tasks first
- Use simple verbal prompts eg 'hold...draw' for prewriting, 'apple with apple' for matching
- Use hand over hand to teach grasps or placement initially
- Use few words and grade the tone and pitch of your voice, while monitoring the child's responses to you – to determine the best type of approach to use
- Give positive feedback 'good drawing', 'good sitting'"
- Count down toward the end of the session eg, one more activity and '5, 4, 3, 2, 1 finished' or use a large sand timer.
- Reward with praise and allow free choice of activity after the session

## Attention to mark making:

Use **crayon rocks** to encourage palmer grasps or **chunky short marker** pencils for emerging pincer grips.

[www.fledglings.org.uk](http://www.fledglings.org.uk): [www.spacekraft.co.uk](http://www.spacekraft.co.uk)

Try small pieces of chalk on slate or varied coloured or textured paper, to add interest.

- Take turns to create marks or copy each other on the paper
- Use motivational noises when scribing such as 'zip for lines across the page' (left to right)' 'weeee for circles'. Use directional words 'down' 'up' for line making
- Use the **pre-writing patterns** and shapes to make pictures and **characters**
- Use messy play concepts – to write in a sand tray or use foam or cream on the table top or a mirror

**Frequency of use:** Complete 10-15 minutes sessions every day.

**Monitor the child's level of response** (interest and motivation) in the task and adjust accordingly (to simplify or increase) to obtain the 'just right fit' and grade challenges (less challenging to more challenging).