

TIPS FOR ATTENTION AND REGULATION

at home



Sometimes, children who struggle with focus and attention can appear to present with stubbornness, “selective listening,” lack of organization, or failure to follow through on simple tasks and expectations. By making simple changes, you can create a supportive environment that empowers your child to thrive and become more independent. Here are some strategies to consider:

USE STATEMENTS VS. QUESTIONS

Use statements rather than questions when there is a set expectation for your child: (e.g., stating, “It’s time to go,” rather than asking, “Are you ready to go?”). This creates a sense of security and understanding of what’s expected.

PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT

Provide feedback and encouragement when you notice they are completing a task or doing something challenging. This “noticing” will improve their own sense of introspection, independence, and intrinsic motivation. Phrases such as, “thank you for washing your plate!” or “great job calming your body” gives cues that they are on track and helps them notice/acknowledge their capabilities

INVOLVE IN PLANNING

Keep a family calendar visible and/or accessible so that plans/appointments and homework projects/assignments are not a surprise and your child knows what to expect. Involve your child in updating the calendar!

HAVE A PLAN FOR ENERGY RELEASE

Work with your occupational therapist to address any sensory needs or unintegrated reflexes. They can provide a tailored home exercise program with strategies to release negative energy (e.g. frustration, anger) through movement and meet sensory needs. This can improve your child’s frustration tolerance and their ability to self-sooth

USE POSITIVE STATEMENTS

Use statements that indicate what your child *should* do, rather than what *not* to do (e.g., “Walk please.” rather than, “Don’t run”). Focusing on clarifying the expectation improves the sense of autonomy and safety, and further reduces feelings of shame or defensiveness.

VISUAL TIMERS AND SCHEDULES

Use a visual timer (e.g. Time-Timer®) to encourage on-task behavior and improve understanding of time. Visual schedules can also be helpful for increasing independence in daily routines (e.g. getting ready, bedtime, etc.) Ask your therapist for help with this!

PREDICTABLE TRANSITIONS

Give “warnings” before transitions (i.e., 5-minutes, 1-minute) so that your child is not caught off-guard or in the middle of something when required to transition. If time is a difficult concept, use concrete statements such as “You can have 3 more times down the slide!”

NUTRITION/SLEEP/EXERCISE

Regular sleep and physical activity are crucial for the ability to regulate behavior and emotions. Prioritize a nutritious diet avoiding overly processed foods, and free from harmful dyes.