



Occupational Therapy

Improving Attention in the Classroom Setting

Children with attention difficulties are among students least likely to follow classroom rules. It is important that the teachers be encouraged to go back to basics by actively teaching rules to all students throughout the school year, specifically teachers should:

1. Remind students of classroom rules and actively teach rules by discussing and pointing out examples of children following them.
2. Maintain eye contact with students as instruction or other activities are in progress.
3. Remind students about expected behaviors before the start of an activity not after a rule has been broken.
4. Circulate throughout the classroom to monitor student behavior and provide feedback in an unobtrusive fashion.
5. Use non-verbal cues and signals to redirect a specific student while teaching others.
6. Ensure academic and non-academic routines are well understood by students.
7. Frequently communicate their expectations about the use of class time in a clear manner.

Due to difficulty with transitions between activities in the classroom and transitions to activities outside the classroom it will be important to preview what the next activity will be. Picture or written schedules are a great way for a child to see each activity. When you have them remove the pictures or cross off the activities as they are completed it gives a definite end to the activity and helps a child move on to the next task.

Teachers are encouraged to arrange the classroom so that students that are highly distractible are more likely to participate in class activities while not restricting opportunities to learn and benefit from instruction. Some students do well sitting in the front of the classroom. Others need their desk placed in a more isolated area to decrease distractions. Clear boundaries (carpet square or tape on the floor) of a child's area or space can help them stay in one place and can help them to keep their hands to themselves and not get into others space.

Youngsters with attention difficulties frequently do not respond to natural incentives, both positive and negative, that are effective with other students. Research has demonstrated that positive reinforcement is highly effective in addressing problem behaviors associated with poor attention. In establishing incentive systems, it is important to ensure that reinforcers are administered immediately and frequently, and that there is variety built into the reinforcement system. Also, to the extent possible, the student should be involved in helping design the incentive program allowing student input on target behaviors, goals and appealing reinforcers.

It will be important to have the child's attention before presenting any auditory information. It is helpful where possible that information be presented in short segments with frequent repetition and summary of important elements to facilitate retention.

Please call TMCSEA (309) 347-5164, if you have any questions.