

Tips for Helping Students Stay Focused

Pick a Location to Minimize Distractions

Tutoring spaces vary from school to school depending on school staff preferences as well as real constraints on available space on campus. However, sometimes making even small changes in location can help to minimize distractions for the student like: moving a table a few feet farther from a neighboring reading buddy or seating the child so they are facing away from the hallway where a class is taking a bathroom break.

Let Kids Get Their “Wiggles” Out

Some kids are fidgety and need to move. One way to help such students is to give them a short time before you start or as a break in the middle of a session to move around, you can have them do exercises in place e.g. jumping jacks, running in place, hopping on one foot, or a quick game of “Simon Says.”

Another great way to get the wiggles out is to incorporate movement into the learning. Have students jump tall or squat down low to practice short and long vowels, or let students think of a gesture for different characters in the story and do that gesture every time they read that character’s name. There are lots of possibilities, get creative or use the power of Google for more ideas.

A final thought to consider about fidgeting is whether it is helping aid concentration or keeping the child from focusing. If a child is bouncing in their seat, but is still actively participating and not getting distracted it may be that fidgeting is helping them focus and should not be discouraged.

Vary the Activities

While some second graders may be able to stay engaged and read book after book during a session, many will most likely lose interest or get fatigued after reading one or two books. Use the supplemental activities in the trunk: sight word bingo, word work on the whiteboard, summarizing strategies, to break up session and sustain interest and focus.

Consider the order in which you present activities as well. Some students may benefit from a higher energy activity first to build up excitement and motivation, while for others it may be hard for them to refocus and so it may be better to save these activities for the end of sessions.

Use a Timer

For many students knowing exactly how long they need to stay focused for will help keep them on task. Phones are okay to bring out for this purpose. You can turn it on airplane mode if you are worried about texts or emails popping up. Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes and let the child know what exactly they will be doing during that time as well as what they will get to do when the timer goes off. When the timer goes off this is the perfect time to utilize a “Get Your



Wiggles Out” activity. Set a timer for this “Brain Break” for 2 to 3 minutes and then when it goes off it is time to continue reading. Repeat this cycle to keep your student focused and on task.

Show Children How to Focus

The ability to focus is an important skill to have for success in many arenas in life, however, like other skills it has to be learned and practiced over time. Some students may need more explicit guidance about what focused behavior looks like. You may want to review with them what you do to be focused: look at the page or the speaker, sit up tall, and think about the words you are reading or the question you are answering.

Focusing is not so much a matter of repressing surplus energy, but rather re-directing that energy into the task at hand. You can model productive use of energy by reading with excitement and dramatization, and encouraging the student to do so as well. Interactions with kids using high affect will help make sessions more enjoyable and engaging.

