

A Quick Guide to Attention and Concentration

For teachers, SENCos and families

What is attention and concentration?

Attention and concentration difficulties describe what is being observed, not a diagnosis or a single explanation. Possible influences include ADHD, autism, anxiety, language or memory needs, sensory load, sleep, hearing, vision, wellbeing and task demand. Classroom evidence should be considered alongside the pupil's and family's perspectives.

What this may look like in the classroom

Starting tasks	Taking a long time to begin or being unsure of the first step.	Environmental distraction	Attention drawn to nearby sound, movement or visual clutter.
Completing tasks	Losing track or requiring frequent prompts to finish.	Movement and talk	Fidgeting, moving, talking or daydreaming during sustained work.
Spoken information	Missing instructions or needing shorter repeated steps.	Organisation	Forgetting homework, equipment, deadlines or task steps.
Independent working	Relying heavily on reassurance, reminders or redirection.	Emotional impact	Frustration, stress or withdrawal as concentration demands build.

Remember: Look for patterns across tasks, times and settings. Support the identified barrier while further assessment is considered, rather than waiting for a diagnosis before making reasonable classroom adjustments.



How to help: practical strategies

Small and consistent adjustments can make a meaningful difference. Support should respond to need and does not require a diagnosis.

01 Ask what is driving the difficulty Consider sleep, hunger, anxiety, pain, sensory load, language and task demand.	07 Gain attention respectfully Use the pupil's agreed cue or name before the instruction, without public correction.
02 Make the first step clear Open with a brief instruction and show exactly how the pupil should begin.	08 Use planned check-ins Prompt at agreed points rather than providing continuous adult supervision.
03 Break work into sections Use short stages with clear stopping points and visible progress.	09 Reduce avoidable distraction Review noise, lighting, clutter and seating with the pupil rather than isolating them.
04 Keep language concise Give one or two key points at a time and remove unnecessary wording.	10 Give specific feedback Notice successful strategy use, persistence and returning to a task.
05 Model before independent work Demonstrate the task, then let the pupil try while the model is still available.	11 Plan movement Allow purposeful movement or short changes of activity before concentration reduces.
06 Use visual structure Use a now and next board, checklist, timer or visual timetable.	12 Trial tools carefully A fidget or movement cushion may help some pupils. Agree its purpose and review its impact.

Attention and dyslexia

The effort involved in decoding, spelling, remembering instructions or producing written work can reduce sustained attention. Equally, attention difficulties may affect literacy learning without dyslexia being present. The full pattern matters.

When assessment may help

Defining Dyslexia can assess whether dyslexia or another SpLD contributes to the picture. Educational ADHD traits screening can support discussion and onward referral, but it is not a medical diagnosis. Wider concerns may require advice from the SENCo, GP or another appropriate professional.

Further support

Defining Dyslexia: screening and SpLD assessment	NHS: ADHD in children and young people	PATOSS: professional information and standards
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For wider assessment and local support pathways, speak with the SENCo or GP and consult your local authority's SEND Local Offer.

