

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Attention and concentration**

*Tegan's teacher wears a perfume that overpowers her sense of smell to the degree that she cannot concentrate and wants to get out of the classroom.*

#### **Points to note**

- A child with autism can be very easily distracted. He may find it hard to concentrate if he is disturbed by background noise, flickering lights or the movement of other children about the room. Classrooms that are very bright and colorful can overload a child with visual information. Many children find it particularly hard to 'filter out' background noise and visual information.
- Stress and anxiety will affect concentration levels. See the [Behaviour Management](#) section for more information.
- Strong perfume or deodorant may be overwhelming to the child, leading to an inability to concentrate.
- The student may have trouble understanding what he needs to focus on; he may be unaware of the 'big picture', concentrating instead on small, irrelevant details.
- The student is likely to have an obsessive interest that can intrude on his thoughts. He may pay little attention to an activity that does not fall into his particular area of interest.
- The student may ignore group instructions because he doesn't realise that he is actually part of the group.
- Attention may be poor where there is a receptive language difficulty and the child does not understand what is being said. He may just 'tune out'.
- The child may have difficulty predicting how long an activity will last; this uncertainty may cause anxiety which will affect his concentration.
- During an activity the student may get stuck but won't ask for help and starts doing something else. Teachers may interpret this as poor concentration.
- It is common for children with autism to be very rigid and selective in their choice of food, ie. they will only eat foods of a certain texture or color. A diet that is nutritionally inadequate could result in tiredness and poor concentration.
- You will find that the student is far better at absorbing information from a documentary program or using educational software than listening to a teacher in class.

#### **What you can do**

- If appropriate, play background music to mask out unwanted noise.
- When demonstrating an activity you'll need to remind the student what he needs to focus on. He may need frequent reminders. Visual cue cards may be more effective than verbal cues.
- Try to incorporate the student's particular topic of interest into activities to increase his

attention and motivation. This could be as simple as placing a sticker related to the child's interest in the corner of a worksheet.

- Use the child's name frequently when addressing the class as a whole. This will help him recognise he is part of the group. If the child has an aide, ask them to repeat the instruction to him individually if necessary.
- Keep your language clear and uncomplicated, giving one instruction at a time. Give the student sufficient time to process the instruction, then check that he has understood.
- Try to keep tasks as relevant and functional as possible. Children with autism tend to lack motivation when given tasks that have little relevance or meaning to them personally.
- Make sure the student understands the activity and knows how to start and when to finish. Use a kitchen timer or clock to show how long the activity will last; this will help him develop a concept of time.
- Place a visual cue card on the student's desk as a reminder to ask for help. It doesn't necessarily have to say 'help' as long as the student knows what it signifies.
- If concentration deteriorates throughout the day, it could be due to low energy levels. If you think the child's diet may be poor, talk to his parents and suggest they consult a dietician.
- If all else fails and the student just won't pay attention, he may need some time out. Remember we all have our bad days!