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9 Ways to Focus Right Now: Harness the Power of ADHD Fidgeting

Attention deficit children and adults can actually improve focus by multi-tasking sometimes. These secondary "fidget" activities may be the key to improving your or your child's ADHD attention and focus.

by Roland Rotz, Ph.D. , Sarah D. Wright

Doing two things at once, it turns out, can actually help focus the ADHD brain on a primary task.

Experts believe that engaging in an activity that uses a sense other than what's required for your primary task — listening to music while reading a social studies textbook, for example — can enhance focus and improve performance in children with attention deficit disorder. These secondary tasks are called fidgets — mindless activities you can do while working on a primary task.

We're not talking about wriggling in your seat. Fidgeting is more intentional. It's pacing or doodling while on the phone, or chewing gum while taking a test. An effective fidget doesn't distract you from your primary task because it is something you don't have to think about.

Use these fidget secrets the next time you or your ADHD child needs help focusing:

Next: Walk or Move...

Walk or Move



Walk or Move

When your ADHD child gets restless and tunes out an important conversation, try walking and talking. Any non-strenuous activity, like playing catch or doing a jigsaw puzzle together, will also work. This is a powerful strategy for talking over your child's day or communicating with your ADD partner about an important matter.

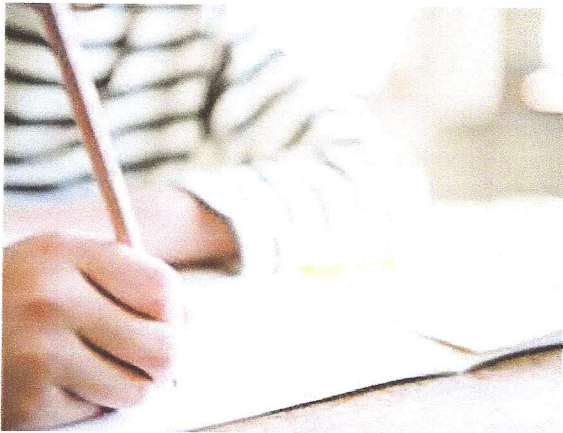
Stand Up or Move Around

Talk with the teacher about small school accommodations like letting your child stand, at appropriate times, during the school day. A child can do this discreetly at the back of the room or at his desk. Some teachers assign a child two desks, so he can move from one to the other when necessary. Other teachers let restless kids be message runners and send them off on real or invented errands.

If you can't focus in a meeting at work, use a coffee break or a visit to the washroom as an excuse to stand. If you're really restless, use a bathroom visit to run up and down a flight of stairs, fast, a few times.

Next: Doodle & Use Special Pens...

Doodle & Use Special Pens



Doodle & Use Special Pens

A creative learning trick is to encourage your child to draw or write words or numbers when listening to a teacher's lecture (just make sure he doesn't doodle on the desk). Doodling will also help ADD adults focus when they're on a long phone call with a client or are in an endless, boring meeting.

Use Multi-Colored Pens and Pencils

This fidget works well when your child needs to complete an assignment or read for comprehension (he can underline words as he reads). Scented markers may also help.

Next: Busy Your Hands...

Busy Your Hands



Busy Your Hands

This facilitates focus when a child is listening, talking, or thinking about how to answer a tough essay question. Fidget toys for school or home include cool-looking pens or pencils, beaded bracelets, paper clips (they bend into interesting shapes and can be linked together), and clothes with interesting textures or doodads.

For adults at work, a small, smooth stone—a worry rock—in your pocket will allow you to fiddle without your boss or colleagues knowing. Curling your hair around a finger also works. At home, knitting or squeezing a Nerf ball can also increase attention.

Next: Tune In...

Tune In



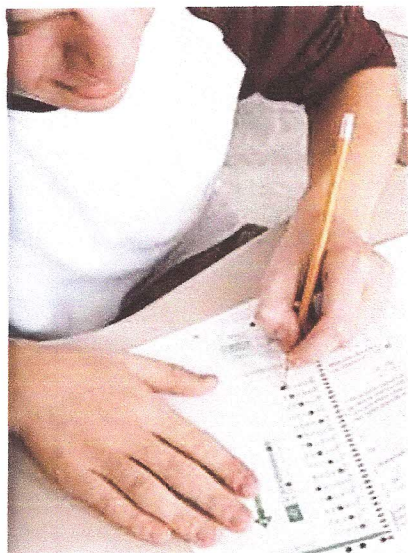
Tune In

Plugging into an MP3 player helps children stay on task when studying, reading, exercising, or even going to sleep. Choose music that is appropriate to the task: a stimulating beat when exercising, calming tunes for sleep, and something in between when studying or reading.

At the office, use this strategy on days when you are working at the computer and have little interaction with colleagues.

Next: Chew Gum...

Chew Gum



Chew Gum

This helps your child when he has to concentrate for an extended period—doing homework or taking a test. Chewing gum in the office is effective when writing a memo or having to slog through a week's worth of e-mail. If gum is not an option, sucking on a lemon drop or other hard candy will also do the trick.

Attention-Boosting Games

Many classic children's games, including Simon Says and musical chairs, require attention and good listening skills—play them for practice.

You can also try **Champion Distractor**, a game where one player focuses on completing a task, while the other does everything possible to distract him. Then, the players switch roles. To win the game, a player needs to be a good Distractor, and also must be able to avoid being distracted by others.

Beat the Clock: Set a timer for 20 minutes, and race to get as much done as possible before the alarm goes off. An adult can use this approach to accomplish any dull household chore—doing dishes, paying bills, or picking up around the house. Your child can race the clock when doing worksheets, memorizing vocabulary, or cleaning up his room.

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