

# 10 PROVEN STRATEGIES

To Help Your Child Focus



**Kristine Tye, M.A. LMFT**

## **Ten Proven Strategies To Help Your Child Focus**

One of the most common struggles for an elementary and middle school aged children is focus. As a parent, a child's lack of focus or the inability to sit still creates many obstacles. There are expectations put upon your child at school and at home when it comes to behavior, task completion and interaction with others. And, when these expectations are consistently unmet, it can cause serious disruption and concern.

Do you wonder if your child has a serious attention problem? Are you concerned about the repercussions of trouble with focusing at school? Are you finding yourself increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed when attempting to get your child to complete a task?

I know that you're hoping for a healthy, positive academic experience for your growing child – and you may be afraid that the struggles he or she is currently having could be creating an unhealthy, negative experience.

### **Why Does My Child Struggle With Getting and Staying Focused?**

There are many things that contribute to a child's difficulty with focusing. Sometimes, the characteristic may be hereditary. Occasionally, there are stressful events in a child's life, such as a change of school, divorce, new sibling or serious illness in the family, that result in an increase in restlessness and inattention. Other times, there are on-going situations that impede your child's developing attention skills. Consider what may be impacting your child's ability to relax, to feel secure, and to feel confident. This will help you design your new approach to helping your child focus.

Perhaps your child has been diagnosed with ADHD, or you may have considered formal testing for this. Although it is commonly diagnosed, there is still a lot of mystery surrounding how to best address ADHD and other attention issues. It is wise to do research on your own, to get a sense of what methods are being used and what feels like the best course of action for your family and your unique child.

Even children who do not qualify for ADHD will likely struggle with focusing within certain environments or following certain experiences. Attention and focus are difficult for many children. It's important to note that regardless of the reason for your child's struggle with focus, there are effective tips and tools that can help you and your family support your child in becoming more present, productive, and attentive. Also, attending to potential focus problems early on can prevent negative habits from forming and allow your child to establish tools to manage his or her attention that will serve useful in many areas of life.

### **How Can I Help My Child?**

The purpose of this free report is to bring structure, clarity and hope to parents who want to best support their child's development through increasing his or her ability to focus.

Helping your child focus is not only important for academic purposes. It will also help him or her to be a more responsible and attentive sibling and friend and a more present and creative person over all.

Sometimes parents blame themselves or others for the trouble that their child is having with focus, behavior or emotional stability. I invite you to thank yourself for taking the time to read

this report and to explore the possibilities that exist for your child's growth and wellness. While there may be useful ways for you to shift your own behavior and expectations for your child, the care and time that you are already providing to your child is the foundation on which any new tips or tools can grow.

Imagine your unique situation and how each of these tips can be tailored to suit your child's unique needs. Begin from a place of empathy for your child, as you consider how difficult, frustrating and scary it can be for him or her to have difficulty focusing in the way that is expected.

## **10 Proven Strategies To Help Improve Focus**

### **1. Create Healthy Structure**

Pay attention to what works for your unique child when it comes to routine and timing for various activities, such as how much time he or she needs to get ready in the morning, how much sleep is needed, or how often your child needs a break when working on homework or a project.

Set clear expectations. Be sure that you're considering what it is that you expect from your child, and that you don't have any unspoken or unclear expectations.

Become an observer of your own overall parenting style. Do you tend to be especially rigid or strict? Perhaps you are easy to anger? Are your rules consistent, or do they change depending on the day? Get to know what you feel your strengths and weaknesses are as a parent, and incorporate your own growth in your role when moving toward a healthier family structure that serves your child's needs.

Daily structure is important for a child's ability to focus because it helps him or her more easily become engaged in an expected task. Consistent structure also helps to reduce distractions and tantrums, and it allows your child to feel more secure. Aim to gradually increase the level of natural structure in your life - either by adding something that creates a firmer structure (such as a consistent bedtime) or by adding something that allows the structure to be more balanced (such as increasing your time spent one-on-one with your child).

**Bottom Line:** My child needs structure. There are many ways for me to contribute to a balanced daily routine for my child. This will help my child to know what to expect and to engage more fully.

### **2. Create a Positive Space**

Children with attention issues can benefit from having a specific space that enriches their learning and growing experiences. An example of this might be an area at home that is specifically designated for homework and learning. Be sure to respect this space, and get excited about the space with your child. A good way to do this is to make the creation of the space a project that you can enjoy working on together.

Allow your child to complete homework or other responsibilities in non-traditional ways. For example, one child may need a still, quiet environment to work at his or her best. Another child may find it easiest to complete work with some music playing in the background, or with an exercise ball to gently bounce on while completing a task.

Of course, creating a positive space for your child also requires being mindful about the places in which he or she spends time. Make sure the spaces your child studies within are encouraging and positive – likely at home, school, and perhaps a day care or friend’s home. Notice the quality of the environment around your child, and see how it may be contributing to his or her state of mind.

**Bottom Line:** My child needs a safe, positive, encouraging space. I am largely responsible for establishing the quality of the space in which my child lives and learns.

### **3. Grab Your Child’s Attention and Make Focus Fun**

Your child’s brain is always developing and looking for new information, so naturally it will be more engaged if a certain topic or activity presents itself as interesting right away. Increase your child’s desire to focus by using internal rewards rather than external. For example, encourage feelings of pride when a creative project is completed, rather than giving you child a treat when a task is done. If you assist your child with noticing and working toward the internal feelings that occur after a project has been completed, you will be helping him or her learn how to work in a way that is both effective and meaningful.

Never beg your child to do something or bribe them with external rewards. Try to aim for creating what can be qualified as a rewarding experience. Notice when your child does something in a clever or unique way, and encourage and applaud it. Make use of your child’s imagination, finding new and fun ways to get things done efficiently and without fuss.

Typically, when thinking about a child’s imagination in relation to his or her ability to focus, it’s common to assume he or she will be daydreaming and letting the imagination make focusing a much more difficult task. However, a child’s imagination can be a powerful tool to assist with training the brain to focus.

Try creating games and activities that help your child practice focus. These could be basic memory and concentration games that you find in a store or online. Even better, though, is exploring interactive ways to increase your child’s awareness through mind-body connection. For example, ask your child to close his or her eyes and imagine his or herself completing a task (such as hitting a baseball and running to home base, drawing a picture of a house, building a sandcastle, etc.). Make part of the game be about noticing how detailed he or she can be in imaging the task, and how long he or she can stay still. Also, be sure to ask your child how it feels to be still for a period of time. This game can accomplish many positive things for your child: not only will it to practice focus, but it will also help your child become more aware of what his or her body is capable of doing and what it actually feelings like to be still and focused. The game will also build self-esteem, helping your child to envision his or herself accomplishing a task to be proud of.

**Bottom Line:** My child’s brain is a powerful tool, and imagination can be used to increase the ability to focus. I can grab my child’s attention with natural rewards, positive feedback, and by making tasks inviting and exciting.

### **4. Strive for Consistency**

Being unable to manage distractions is a major cause of focus troubles for many children. Building the tools necessary for managing distractions depends on your ability to prioritize consistency. For example, inconsistent rules relating to electronics and television make it harder

for a child to really know whether it's time to work or whether he or she can play instead. It's actually part of your child's developmental task at this stage in life to push limits and test boundaries.

Hyperactivity is often a symptom of anxiety in children, and inconsistent messages from your child's surroundings will contribute to an anxious or restless state of being. Consistency in schedule, rules and expectations can reduce feelings of tasks being overwhelming or confusing for your child.

Of course, there are often life events that make consistency much more difficult. This may be something anything from a flat tire on the way home from school to his or her parents' divorce. Work in conjunction with your co-parent, your child's teacher, and other important adults in your child's life to help create and maintain consistency.

**Co-Parenting Tip:** Focus on what you can do, not what you can't. You can only control your own behavior, not your co-parent's. Invite your co-parent to participate in developing consistency strategies for your child, and be sure that you are truly open to their ideas and contributions.

**Bottom Line:** My child needs consistency. Events will likely occur that will disrupt the lifestyle that my child is used to. We can shift the balance back toward consistency with patience, planning and positivity.

## **5. Be Present**

Plan some one-on-one time for you and your child. Being present means being engaged and involved in the moment with your child. Your child is learning to regulate his or her own behavior and emotions internally in more mature ways. Before this can be done effectively, however, he or she must learn to regulate emotions through a relationship with you.

Sometimes, it can help to talk through a difficult situation with your child. Accept your child's feelings, and reflect back what you imagine might be helpful. For example, if your child is describing feeling "bored" or "restless," validate those feelings and then respond with something like, "I know when I'm feeling bored, it can be really hard to focus and that can make me feel frustrated. Let's think of something we can try to make this work better." You may be amazed at the impact that your increased mindful presence has on your child's ability to regulate his or her emotions and ability to focus.

Be present whenever possible if your child needs focus on something like homework. For example, even when you aren't directly helping with homework, sit somewhat near your child, reading a book or quietly attending to some work of your own. This sets the mood for the household, giving a subtle yet powerful message that it is time to focus. This also shows your child that you are available if help is needed, while still encouraging independent work.

**Bottom Line:** My child needs me to be present. I can use my presence to teach him or her about living in the present moment and being focused on a current task.

## **6. Keep Communication Clear and Positive**

Be aware of what your expectations are for your child, and be sure that you communicate these expectations clearly, in a way that your child will understand. For example, let your know that

you expect him or her to put dishes in the sink right after her or she eats, and that you appreciate that helpful gesture.

Practice asking for and noticing the behavior that you want to see, rather than addressing and condemning behavior that is undesirable. Your child craves attention, and if you respond primarily to negative behavior, your child will know that this behavior is the type that gets attention from you. Instead, try to identify specific things about your child's personality that you appreciate. For example, "I like how you're showing me that I can trust you to get this reading homework done before dinner time, like we agreed." Or, try saying, "It makes me so proud to see what a hard worker you are." Highlight your child's personal qualities and his or her developing strengths and abilities.

**Bottom Line:** My child needs my communication to be clear and positive. My child is developing communication skills that he or she will utilize throughout life.

## **7. Keep Physical Health in Check**

Make sure that your child is up to date with doctor visits. Being aware of anything health-related that may be impacting your child is important.

Prioritize healthy eating habits. It is crucial that your child's brain is properly fueled throughout the day. Proper nutrition contributes to his or her ability to regulate mood, focus on tasks, listen to others and respond appropriately to interpersonal situations.

Stay aware of any sleep patterns that change for your child. Include bedtime and morning routine at the top of the list for consistency (see #1).

Use exercise and play time as a time to practice focus, delayed gratification and perseverance. Play physical games and activities that are age-appropriate.

**Bottom Line:** My child's physical state is closely related to his or her mental state. I can help my child focus by keeping his or her health on track.

## **8. Model Healthy Habits**

You may not realize how much your child watches and emulates your way of navigating your work, your health, and your way of interacting with others. Sometimes we miss opportunities to emulate appropriate behavior for our children. Your actions are far more powerful than your words.

Often, being a good parent means making huge sacrifices yourself in order to do what's best for your child. A widely common mistake that parents make is compromising their own needs to the extent that it causes over-exhaustion, poor time-management, and high levels of stress. This can also include too much multi-tasking and a lower level of focus within your own day. Any time you sacrifice in a way that compromises your own basic needs, you may be putting your child at risk when it comes to his or her need for the healthiest, happiest, most focused version of you.

**Bottom Line:** My child needs me to act out the healthy habits that I want him or her to use. Working on my own to have focus, clarity, and a mindful way of going about my day will create an environment for my child that fosters focus.

## 9. Aim for “Good Enough”

You may notice that you do not always feel like you are the parent that you planned to be. You also might catch yourself blaming other people for your child’s situation, and feeling hopeless to change it.

Be careful not to put pressure on yourself to be the perfect parent. This kind of expectation will create disappointment, tension and inconsistency within your home because it’s simply impossible to be perfect. Being patient with yourself helps you to become more patient with your child. In fact, reconciling and discussing, or “repairing,” after a difficult interaction or mistake can be a valuable learning tool for your child. For example, if you both get frustrated during a homework session, take a break and return to a neutral place. Offer to talk with your child, and to truly listen to his or her feelings about what happened. Apologize if you make a mistake. You’ll both learn how to better address the situation next time.

Pay attention to any tips and tools that you find useful, and aim to gradually incorporate them into your lifestyle, so that they genuinely mold to a new structure that works for your family.

**Bottom Line:** To be a good enough parent is to be the best parent. I can keep a positive attitude even when I miss the mark with keeping up the structure, consistency or communication in my relationship with my child.

## 10. Know When To Seek Help

If your child has a strong emotional reaction to the thought of doing homework, such as crying, panicking, angry outbursts, getting help early can be crucial to his or her current and future success. These reactions are not only troubling to you and others who are around your child, but your child is likely scared on the inside about how he or she is feeling and responding. Ongoing and pervasive negative reactions need to be addressed. Pay attention to how often your child talks about what he or she can’t do, or doesn’t want to do, rather than what he or she can do. Also notice if there are any negative or extreme comments about his or her own intelligence or competence, such as, “I’m stupid,” or, “I never get anything right.”

Restlessness, irritability or persistent sadness surrounding tasks may signify that your child is in danger of creating a negative self-view and aversion to attempting new challenges. It is necessary to begin shifting your child’s view of his or herself and of his or her work in order to build healthy self-esteem.

It is important to be pro-active about helping your child learn to focus, because this skill will help him or her build a framework with which to address many life situations throughout the process of growing up. The ability to focus enough to create clear, creative goals – and then to persevere in order to move toward those goals – is an ability that can make a huge difference for your child’s academic, social and emotional development. Focus and clarity in the mind of your child fosters the necessary confidence required to help him or her succeed.

**Bottom Line:** My child deserves the best chance for healthy self-esteem and emotional development. Trouble focusing can develop into a deeper issue that is best addressed as soon as possible. Helping my child develop tools that increase focus and confidence will be a valuable investment in his or her future.

### How I Can Help

As a Marriage and Family Therapist and child specialist, I am familiar with the struggles that children and families experience. I am also familiar with the solutions that help these children to grow and succeed. A short assessment process can help me, and you, to determine what is best for your child when it comes to the next steps toward academic, social, and emotional wellness. You need to know whether or not your child is experiencing depression, anxiety, ADHD symptoms, relational stress at school, or just restlessness and boredom. My experience has repeatedly shown that early intervention can open up many more possibilities for a child, as therapy will help him or her to redirect away from negative habits and to utilize strengths more effectively.

I can offer you support, strategies, tools and guidance. Don't hesitate to reach out so that you can start getting your questions answered and start feeling confident in your child's well-being and future success. Your child deserves the best chance at a fulfilling and exciting growing-up experience.

Contact Kristine:

[www.kristinetherapyla.com](http://www.kristinetherapyla.com)

818-923-1038