Activities and advice for children seeking movement or having difficulty concentrating in the classroom

Movement breaks and heavy work can enable children to regulate their alertness and improve focus.

Encourage children to have regular movement breaks such as doing jobs around the classroom and the school. Schedule movement breaks into the timetable for periods when the child has most difficulty with fidgeting/attention. This will help to pre-empt difficulties and provide the movement sensation the child needs in a structured way. All of the activities can be easily incorporated into the school routine.

- Allow children access to their own fidget toy, such as stress ball. This will reduce the distraction caused by them searching out something to fiddle with. Give them rules as to how this can be used and what will happen if the rules are broken. Monitor its use to ensure it is helping improve attention not distract further!
- An inflatable cushion may reduce the need to fidget, or enable children to have movement sensation in a more subtle way, which is less distracting in the classroom.
- Have students push against the wall, to make the room ‘bigger’.
- Do chair push ups.

- Try a short walk around the class and then sitting down again.
- Provide as many opportunities as possible for active work during the day eg writing on the white board instead of at the table

- During PE use upper limb weight bearing activities which help to encourage calm but alert levels of attention.
- Involve children in classroom responsibilities such as:
  - collecting books or handing out worksheets etc for the teacher
  - taking the register to the office
  - place chairs on desks at end of day or take down at the beginning
  - erase the white board
  - wash desks or white board
  - help rearrange desks in the classroom
  - fill crates with books to take to other classrooms. Teachers could ask children to move these crates back and forth as needed
  - sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener
  - staple paper on to the wall for wall displays and bulletin boards.

- Animal walks to transition between areas.
- Tug of war.
- Pushing out play dough on the desk.
- Going on a climbing frame/monkey bars or gym hoops.
- Taking a walk but with a back pack with books in it for weight to provide deep pressure for the shoulders.
- Knee walking or batting a balloon whilst on their knees.
- Row boats - sit facing another child, put feet together and hold hands: push and pull as though rowing.

Maintaining attention in the classroom:

- Sitting near the front in class or near the teacher to maintain attention and reduce visual distractions.
- Give the child their own ‘spot’ and place to sit on during carpet time/assembly etc.
- Working in different positions and changing position regularly can help children to maintain their attention, for example, working lying on their
Prior to handwriting have the child do some hand warm ups including: pressing palms together, pulling each fingertip, press palms on to the desk, chair push ups with hands flat on the seat, finger taps on a table top, shaking hands to relax.

Children who appear over aroused by the classroom may benefit from quiet, “time out” spaces to help them to regroup and become organised. Examples include a reading corner behind a bookshelf, a tent, or a bean bag chair in a quiet corner.

Children who seem under aroused, slouching on the desk, falling asleep may benefit from jumping on a mini-trampoline or bouncing on a therapy ball.

Considerations in the environment:

Visual considerations

- Lighting: bright lights and flickering fluorescent lighting can be distracting and stimulating. Try to find an environment where natural light is present or the lighting can be dimmed. A reading lamp or torch could be used to help the child focus their attention on their work.
- Visual distractions: keep objects that will be distracting to the child to a minimum. These include wall displays, items that are hanging or mobiles that flutter.
- Jewellery and long hair or bright clothing on the teacher or other children can also be distracting and should be considered as part of the overall environment.
- Place work at the child’s eye level, Using sloped working surfaces and easels may be helpful.

Olfactory or smell considerations

- Consider the proximity of the room to the cafeteria or toilets and the odours that may be wafting into the room.
- Teachers’ perfume may also have an effect on the child’s ability to focus their attention.

Auditory or noise considerations

- Noise levels – loud, high pitched and irregular noise will increase the child’s alertness and affect their ability to focus their attention. Try to work in an environment where noise is kept to a minimum and pre-warn children of unexpected noise (bells/fire alarms) if possible.
- Use rooms with carpeted floors rather than hard floors as this can help to minimise noise.
- Consider the effect of the teacher’s voice level and degree of animation on the child’s levels of alertness.
- Provide the child with headphones if a quiet environment is not available. However it is important to consider the effect of the feel of the headphones, and ensure that it is not counterproductive to calming the child.
- Use of some background music or white noise tapes such as waves lapping on the shore.
- Place slit tennis balls on the legs of the classroom chairs to prevent the noise of the chairs moving on a hard floor.
- Consider using music to signify the end of class session rather than a bell, or muffle the bell if possible.

Touch or tactile considerations

- Textures of clothing or floor surfaces may be upsetting to the child. Soft and smooth textures will usually help to calm the child. Avoid clothes with prickly, stiff texture and fluffy prickly bits.
- Cut the labels off of clothing if necessary.
- Avoid sitting on prickly or fluffy carpets. Using a special carpet square for the child to sit on during carpet time may be helpful or choose smooth soft fabric for the child to sit on.
- Allow the child to wear long pants in the summer, and long sleeve cotton shirts if he prefers to avoid unexpected touch.
- Allow the child to stand at the end/beginning of the line.

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