

Get Set for Middle School:

A guide to Preparing Students for Middle School from an Occupational Therapy Perspective

3. Strategies for Maintaining Attention and Focus

The brain of a typical middle school student is growing and reorganizing at a quick but inconsistent pace. The average attention span for an 11 to 14 year old is at best 10 -12 minutes. These tips may help to keep students focused and maximize attention span:

For the Teacher:

- Minimize environmental distractions in classroom (ie over decorated walls, dangling objects from ceiling, overloud volume on auditory devices)
- Break lessons into 10 -12 minutes segments
- Avoid interruptions in teaching/lesson segments (ie allow bathroom breaks only between lesson segments)
- Use interactive learning techniques (ie groups, activities, applicable games etc)
- Avoid combining auditory and visual components into one lesson segment (ie reading passage with embedded video)
- Maintain consistent classroom schedule for teaching, activities and maintenance tasks (ie copying assignments from board, collecting homework, checking classwork etc)
- Before initiating each lesson, provide a brief verbal overview of what will be presented, expectations for note taking, and included tasks/activities)
- Orient desks facing front toward teacher for teaching/ lesson segments (don't have students turning heads or reorienting body position to maintain visual contact with teacher – desks can be moved for group or interactive activities)
- Move particularly distractible students to front of classroom away from door
- Allow for regular movement breaks between lesson segments
 - Incorporate movement into interactive learning activities
 - Allow students to stand at desk to complete writing assignments
 - Ask for volunteers to erase whiteboard, pass out or collect papers, and collect supplies as needed
 - Suggest that students as a group stretch or do 5 chair push-ups during teaching/lesson break

For the Student:

- Keep all school materials and supplies organized (see Organizational Strategies sheet)
- Plan ahead and have all required books, assignments and supplies (Pens, pencils, binder etc.)with you when you enter classroom
- Avoid having to return to locker except during class breaks
- Stop at water fountain between classes to stay hydrated

- Quietly change position in your desk but always sit upright with feet on floor when taking notes or completing written assignments
- Pack crunchy or chewy foods for lunch (ie carrots, chips, granola bars or gummy bears)
- Use a straw at lunch for drinks
- Walk quickly but safely when changing classes
- Keep books close to your body when carrying in hallways
- Use a backpack to carry books and supplies to and from school

Links:

- http://www.parents.com/parents/search/results.jsp?_dyncharset=ISO-8859-1&_dynSessConf=-1242174966818071361&searchString=intellectual+development&searchType=allsearch