

Ep #15 5 ways to help ADHD kid refocus

In this episode, I will discuss things your child can do on their own to help them refocus and pay attention, especially in places like school where there's not a lot of movement which is allowed.

This is episode 15.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series. The parenting coach for ADHD, here to heal and elevate lives is your parenting coach, Siope Kinikini.

Well, hello, everybody. I hope everybody is doing well. I actually feel super great because I, for the first time, am not wearing a suit jacket, thank goodness. I am super comfortable. As a Polynesian, we are used to wearing like alohas and Hawaiian shirts or flowers and stuff like that. It's free. The thing is I live here in the rocky mountains and it's cold here, so I usually wear a jacket of some sort. Luckily, spring is here, and so super glad to actually be a little bit free so I can move around. And this is intentional actually for this particular episode because what I wanted to do is talk to you as a parent on things that you can teach your child to do on their own to help them refocus and pay attention, and also to help them with the inattentiveness that they may feel, especially when they're in places like school, where they can't just get up and run around or expend some of that energy, right?

So one thing I wanted to start off with, is it needs to be clear and understood that children who have ADHD often struggle with what is immediate and what is in the future. There is this video that I was watching about a study where they had children sit and they were going to give these children a marshmallow, okay? So it's one marshmallow, and it was a test. And these young children, if they could sit there and just look at some marshmallows but not eat it, later on, they would receive two marshmallows. But if they ate it right then, then they wouldn't get more marshmallows later. It was supposedly supposed to test their ability to refrain from getting immediate gratification, so delayed gratification. That's what we call it in the field anyway. It was testing whether or not they could delay the gratification.

Now, for a child with ADHD, that is really, really hard to do because we're always thinking in the immediate now, what's happening now, and easily distractable in what is now instead of looking at what is ahead. And that's part of the impulsivity is the inability to control that idea that, "Hey, I'm in control and I can calm down," instead of being super excitable and wanting what's immediate, what's easy, right? So it's important to understand that kids with ADHD or kids that struggle with ADHD will often focus on whatever is immediate, and that's why the inattentiveness just tends to always shift. It's like what's new, what's happening?

Now, at the same time, that also means that they increase in boredom, like they can be bored super fast with a lot of different things. And so it's like, "Hey, I'm looking over here... Oh, I'm bored. Move." And what happens with being bored like that is that it becomes super frustrating, right? You can't pay attention. I mean, somebody is talking to me and they introduce themselves. Sometimes I forget their name and they just told me. I'm sure that's happened to a lot of people, but it's that inability to really kind of be present and be in the moment. And so what I wanted to do is offer some of these exercises that will help your child refocus and reframe so they can be in the moment and actually learn skills to focus a little bit better.

So these are things that hopefully will help them stay engaged in whatever is happening around them, but they're easy things that they can do.

#1 Isometric exercises

What I wanted to start off with is something called isometric exercises, and these are things that your child can do even sitting down. They can do sitting down. It has to do with their body. And the idea is that it's a pushing or pulling movement where you're exerting force with your muscles for a time, and then just focusing on that. One example would be, for example, bringing your hands together like this or like this. So I'm putting them together flat against each other, or I'm clasping them together and I'm just applying pressure. I'm pushing into my hands, right? And by doing this, what I'm doing is I'm focusing on the pressure that is being applied, okay?

Another thing that can be done is you can put your hands on a table or on another surface, and that actually exert force in pushing down, right? And what you're doing is you're increasing it so you can feel some muscle tension in there, and that actually will help them focus more on what is happening with their arms, because you're paying attention to the pressure that you feel, the warmth of the object that you're pressing against, like a desk. Is it warm, the surface? How it feels, is it rough? Is it soft? I mean, all of these things are happening and it's holding it in that position for just a little while, and then letting go and letting your muscles relax.

Another way to do that would be with your legs. You can actually push your knees together if your child is sitting. You can push your knees together and apply pressure, pushing them together and flexing, and then letting it go. So holding it there for a little bit, maybe 10 seconds and increasing pressure during that time, and then letting go and exhaling, right?

Another one could be feet on the floor. So if they're sitting, applying pressure and pushing down their feet on the floor and balancing that out, okay? So what you're doing is you're teaching them to do these physical things with their body that apply pressure, and that helps them refocus, refocus on what they're doing, right? It's called isometric exercises. There are a lot of different kinds that you can try and your child can try. This would require you to actually practice it with them, so you'll want to practice doing these things with them to help them know how to do it, right?

A child can do this anywhere. They can do this in class while they're seated somewhere, if they have to listen to somebody talk for a long time. They can actually do these and try and pay attention to what is happening. So the general idea is actually to bring them back into the present moment by doing something physical right?

#2 Fidget spinners or stress balls

Now, another thing that you can try, and a lot of people have done this, it was popular actually a couple years ago, was a fidget spinner, right? You had those fidget spinners that would just spin, and it was something they could play with. And the reason that that worked is because it had some tactility. When I was younger, what they did was they had stress balls, right? So you could use stress balls. Now, you can actually make your own stress ball, super easy. All you do is you can get some balloons, some round balloons, and fill them up with popcorn kernels or beans and then just seal it up, and you will get some tactical feel when you start squeezing those things, very similar to a stress ball.

So you can put actually anything in there. You can put sugar inside a balloon, and then close it off and do that. I would recommend actually you double balloon it if you can, just because after a while it does wear, but don't make it big and make it actually just a little bit smaller than their palm or about half the size of their palm, so they can grip it but it's not going to fall away because it's too small. So using something like that, a device that they can squeeze and they can constantly squeeze. Now, if you notice, this is also pretty much an isometric exercise by using the squeeze ball. Fidget spinners are the same because they occupy some type of tactical comfort and and you can access more resources that way, resourcefulness in your own body to kind of help you refocus, right? So that's another suggestion that you can try.

#3 Give them a challenge

Another thing that you can try for children is you can teach them to be creative when they're at school. So if a child is sitting there and has to do an assignment, you can help them excite their brain so they're not bored with it by giving them a challenge. And the challenge would be, if they're right handed, instead of doing the assignment with the right hand, try and do some of it with their left hand. It doesn't have to be the whole assignment. It could be like, write your name at the top with your left hand. Do that and then switch. It will require quite a bit of concentration on their part and coordination for them to even attempt doing something like that, but the goal, again, is to refocus and to recenter, so they're able to pay attention, for a short amount of time, they can pay attention to something and really focus on it.

So yeah, writing things with the opposite hand or doing something with the opposite hand that you are used to doing things is another tactic that you can provide your child to try to help them to refocus and to pay attention.

#4 Mindfulness

Now, obviously, breathing mindfulness is a wonderful tool, and that involves just closing the eyes, taking deep breaths and counting backwards. The recommendation for that is that, again, it helps the body reset, and by closing their eyes, they are visually not distracted by things that are outside or around them that could pull focus. So closing their eyes, they still have their auditory or they can hear things that may be distracting, but that's less difficult to manage than it is to see something visual. So have them close their eyes, take deep breaths in and out, and even hold it and count backwards from five, so five, four, three, two, one, then exhale, okay? So using some of these breathing techniques, closing the eyes will help them refocus and it will help them be able to move forward.

#5 Focus on a specific thing or color

Now, another tactic that you can try is that you can also make this a game for them, and that is to, for example, for my own in attentiveness, I used to play a game with myself where when I knew I was slipping in and out of focus with whatever was happening, I decided to try and focus on one specific thing. And so, for example, I would focus on one color. So I would focus on the color red, for example, and I would pay attention to anything in the room that was red. And what that would do is actually keep me from moving around from subject to subject to focusing on one subject but still jumping around, but it's connected. And so, there was a purpose in the distraction to help me focus and narrow my ability to maintain things in this sphere rather than something that's more bigger and more difficult to manage.

So again, if I was in class, then I'd say, "Okay, I'm going to just open my eyes, and when I opened my eyes, I'm going to pay attention to the color red." And I will look for anything around me that is red, okay? And then I would be able to look around and I would pay attention to that, and... Yeah. What that does is it makes your child focus on something specific rather than the destructibility of everything around them, all right? So that's a technique you can also try.

Now, if your child is on an IEP or an individualized education program or plan, then it may actually include something like breaks every 15 minutes, where they can go outside and run, or get up and get a drink, or go to the bathroom, some type of movement, which is super helpful. So use those also as ways to help your child refocus when they're in environments where they should be actually more focused and paying attention.

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So with all of these techniques, it is always recommended that you [Role-play](#) it with them. Now, you can find how to do that, how to Role-play on the Smarter Parenting website. We have a specific skill about [Role-play](#). The reason why Role-playing is so important is this, is it will actually teach your child to have almost muscle memory on what they need to do. So the more you practice it, the more it's ingrained in their brain, the more likely they are to implement something that you've taught them when you're not there or when they need it, right? It goes back to the idea that practice makes perfect, or practice is the way that we actually integrate and learn things. If we are to play a piano, if we are to play an instrument, if we are going to do anything that requires some skill, we would need to practice it. And so these are specific things that they need to practice.

So I'm going to go through them again. You can use isometric exercises, which is applying pressure, using your body to apply pressure and then releasing. That will help them refocus. Using something like a squeeze ball or a fidget spinner, that will be something to help them refocus and pay attention. Writing with an opposite hand or doing something with the opposite hand if they're working on something, that will help them also learn to refocus and pay attention. Breathing and closing your eyes, counting backwards, that's another method that you can use, or focusing on a specific topic or object or color, which I showed through the example of looking at anything in the room that was the color red, right?

It could be anything really. It doesn't have to even be a color. So you could say, "I'm going to open my eyes and I'm going to pay attention to anything that is interesting to me, that's different, that I haven't seen before," and have them do something more like that, or, "I'm going to pay attention to how many people have brown hair in the room or straight hair in the room," or it could just vary, but it's just something to help them bring in the focus into something that's more narrow so they can learn to control this idea of just jumping all around and moving all around, all right?

Yeah. Wow, that's a lot of stuff. I'm excited actually for people to implement some of this stuff because I think it will be super helpful, especially for kids. If you're able to roleplay it enough that they can do it on their own, that it will be really, really helpful for them. And you can actually do this with your child while you're driving, and you can mention one of these things and they can practice it. Like isometric exercises, they can do anywhere, and even while you're driving somewhere, you can practice with them in the car because you don't have to watch them do it, but they can report on how it's working for them.

So yeah, go ahead and make one of those squeeze balls too with balloons and popcorn kernels, or you can use sugar or salt and put that in there. I like the popcorn kernels because they have bumps in them and they tend to retain some of their shape when I squeeze, and then I flip it and I squeeze again. So you can make those as big or as small as you want, but again, don't make it so big that it's hard to hold, and don't make it so small that it'll just fall out of their hands.

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Check out the following resources to help your child refocus:

[5 ways to get your ADHD child to calm down](#)

[How to help ADHD child focus](#)

[5 ways to teach self-regulation strategies to children](#)

[The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#) with Siope Kinikini

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