

COMPONENT 1: Student attention



Be sure your student is paying attention to you before you ask him to do or say something. Without good attention, it will be difficult for your student to respond correctly or to learn. Students with autism may have trouble paying attention.

WHAT DOES PAYING ATTENTION LOOK LIKE?

Students with autism may be paying attention even if they are not looking right at you. Look for other signs of attention, such as a child's turning his body toward you, reaching, pointing, imitating your actions or sounds, or looking at you out of the corner of his eye. You should identify which behaviors indicate attention for individual students.

WHAT DOES NOT PAYING ATTENTION LOOK LIKE?

Sometimes it is clear that a student is not paying attention. For example, behaviors such as crying, hand flapping, repeating sounds, and walking away all indicate that your student is not attending. Other behaviors may be harder to notice. A student who is facing you but holding a toy he really likes may or may not be paying attention to you. A student who is sitting next to you at a table but staring up toward the corner may or may not be attending to you. In these situations, you should rely on what you know about the student to decide. If you have to repeat yourself several times, this is a sure sign that the student is not paying attention. Stop repeating, gain the child's attention, and then give the instruction again in a clear, simple way.

INDICATORS OF ATTENTION

- Looking toward the teacher (maybe out of the corner of the eye)
- Looking toward the teaching materials
- Body is oriented toward the teacher or materials
- Not engaged in self-stimulatory behavior
- Not playing with an object
- Reaching for teaching materials or toy

WAYS TO GAIN A STUDENT'S ATTENTION BEFORE GIVING AN INSTRUCTION

Choose motivating activities. Use toys and activities that your student enjoys. Your student may enjoy puzzles or cars and can ask for those by using sounds, words, or phrase speech. One toy can be used for many activities. A block may be used initially to teach constructive play or word imitation, and later as a "cookie" to teach symbolic play. You can add stickers your student likes to worksheets, make a math game out of toy cars, or pretend that a fan is an airplane engine.

In group situations, it can be harder to keep every student paying attention. Try letting students take turns choosing a story or song at circle time. You can give each student an object that goes along with the lesson, and have them respond to questions and play along. Other adults can redirect the students' attention back to the activity when necessary.

Be close. Being close by and providing an opportunity for face-to-face contact will help ensure that your student is able to attend to your instructions and be successful. It is less likely that your student will attend to an opportunity you provide from across the room. You may need to touch your student on the arm to gain his attention. If your student is sitting, sit with him. If your student is standing, but is very young, you may need to squat down in order to gain his attention.

Be fun. The more you enjoy yourself, the more your students will enjoy playing with you and listening to you. Be playful, silly, and animated, and watch your students' reactions to the things you do.