

Attention Control Drills

1 Focused attention exercises improve intensity and duration: here you focus your attention on one object. This single focus of attention is maintained throughout a practice session; when attention wanders, it is returned to the object of attention. A good way to try this is using the second hand of a clock – time yourself and see how long you can sustain your attention prior to distraction. Work on increasing the time.

2 Attention shifting exercises require attending to body sensations and “shuttling” the attention between the different channels discussed earlier. This will improve your flexibility and the ability to pay attention to multiple things on demand. A good exercise can be found in the book **METTLE (Mental Toughness Training for Law Enforcement)** by **Laurence Miller**. It is repeated here for you to practice:

“To begin training in this technique, first assume a relatively comfortable position, relatively free of distractions. Eventually you should be able to evoke and utilize this technique even under conditions of extreme stress and chaos but, at first, practice in a relatively quiet setting.

Pick an object in the room – a picture, lamp, cup or even a spot on the wall – and visually focus your attention on it as intently and as long as possible. Try to keep all of your attention on this object, tuning out any other stimuli in the room. Hold that focus for as long as possible. Then voluntarily shift your attention away from the object to another object in the room. Make that your focus of attention. Try this with a few other objects around the room.

Now try it with sounds. Focus on a single sound you hear (could be a lawnmower outside, a TV in the next room, hum of the fridge). Pick one sound and hone in on it. Now switch to another sound, and then another, as you did with the visual objects. Keep doing this until it starts to feel natural.

Now try going back and forth between visual and auditory stimuli. To make it interesting, try it with different objects or with the same objects. Keep practicing until you get it right.

Now broaden your focus. Scan the entire room and become aware of as many sources of stimuli as possible: the objects in the room, their shapes, colors, textures, and proximity one another, the sounds and noises in the room, the temperature and smells, the pressure of the seat on your legs and buttocks, the feel of the clothes on your skin.

Next pay attention to internal source of physical and mental stimulation as well: are you hot or cold? Hungry or thirsty? Comfortable? Tired or rested, calm or nervous, happy or sad? What are you thinking?”

Shift your attention between these internal and external stimuli.

It will be difficult at first to change attention and focus on all of the things – but it will improve.