

# How to Keep Children Focused

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Children are easily distracted. What you need to do is divert their attention from the distraction. Below are some suggestions on how to redirect focus.

- Voice inflection: Get their attention; change pitch, volume, or tone.
- Change body position. (e.g., sitting to standing, having everyone lie on their tummies to focus their attention, etc.)
- Making eye contact can be enough to help a child who is rarely out of line. It is a good habit to constantly make eye contact with all children. Don't just glance at children, but actually hold your look until eye contact is established. You should always make eye contact with every child whenever possible. This will allow you to immediately recognize who is paying attention and who is tuning out.
- Ask questions directed at a child who needs refocusing. (e.g., "Mark, what is this piece of equipment called?")
- Brief change of activity: (e.g., "Let's all stand up and do stork stands." "Let's all touch our noses!")
- Use the word "when" not "if." (The word, if, challenges a child to test you more than "when" does.)
- Use the words "get to" not "have to." Getting to do something sounds more like a treat; having to do something sounds more like a chore.
- Acknowledge good listeners with praise. Don't focus on just those who are not listening.
- Sound effects and attention getters - Make different bursts of noises:
  - Boop! Swoop! Bzzzz! Shhhhhh!
  - Clap your hands.
  - Magic Trick - Abracadabra!
  - "Hold the phone!" Suddenly, make a phone ring sound and answer it. (Have the children play along.)
  - Use a foreign accent to be silly.
  - Put your listening ears on. (New batteries for your ears)
- After you have grabbed the attention of all the children, you can "shhh" to them and whisper the rules or whatever your objective is for the moment. A whisper is very effective after you have refocused the children. Yelling tends to be tuned out and is ineffective in uncontrollable situations.
- Use your imagination (along with voice inflection and tone). If you need to capture the children's attention, turn them into certain objects or create a simple scenario for them to act out:
  - Float like a balloon.
  - Make a butterfly with their hands.
  - Drive on a trip to somewhere in a car.
  - Make a pancake or other goodie.
  - Do some of the filler songs. (Here's a Cup, Here's a Bunny, My Gym Listener, etc.)
  - Break out into a song they all know.
- Use your imagination to create a story. This works well when doing a manip. (e.g., Use a 10-inch ball. "I got this ball at the store the other day. I put it on my head, but it rolled down to my nose (child rolls ball down to nose). The ball rolled down my legs. I tried to stop it by putting my foot on it, etc.")
- As a last resort, disciplining the child who is "leading" the pack, so to speak, can be an effective form of control. Always utilize the "3, 4, and 5-step rule," and discipline quietly in the child's ear. Of course, you do not want to embarrass any child. However, speaking to the child in a matter of fact way will help him, as well as all other children, to understand that there are consequences

for their choices. Example: “Noah, you chose not to listen, so you can sit over here and think about the choice you made.” Thank the children for being great listeners. Check in with the child in about a minute, and invite him back to the group in a loving and nurturing manner.