

Helping Your Kid Focus: 6 Straightforward Strategies That Work

As parents, we want to do the most for our kids - especially when it comes to their education. We play a major role in supporting our kids' learning, so when my daughter started struggling with writing, I did what any caring parent would do: I sat down to help.

She was totally on board - at first. But the situation quickly fell apart.

Trying to get her to focus was like pulling teeth, and five minutes in we're both tearing out our hair and in full meltdown mode.

We both left the table frustrated and none the wiser. Head in my hands, I wondered: *how can I get her to sit down, focus, and try?*

Well, I went ahead and did the research so you don't have to. Here are five proven and effective strategies for getting your child to sit down and *focus* (without the fight):

#1: Create a Pre-Learning Ritual

Kids thrive on routine - they like knowing what to expect and when. My old strategy of "*Hey, I have a few minutes right now, let's sit down and get to work!*" was a total flop. Poor baby girl wasn't ready to shift gears from playing pop star in her room to writing a sentence.

Turns out, easing into learning works a lot better than springing it on them. A five-minute warning with a bell worked best for us, but be creative with how you signal your kid, and pick something that appeals to your kid.

Here are a few small, but effective strategies you can use to signal that it's time to learn:

- Set the mood with a scented candle or a special lamp
- Offer cookies and chocolate milk
- Play instrumental music
- A little pre-study chit-chat at the table (or wherever you'll be learning)
- Do a short stretch-out session
- Sit and make a mini-goal list for that session

#2: Make Big Tasks Feel Small

Oftentimes, bridging the knowledge gap can feel like climbing a mountain - especially for little ones who've only just started their learning journey. All the things they don't know and can't do yet feel so far out of reach.

So take that big learning goal and chop it up into bite-sized morsels. You'll help your child kick that big overwhelm right in the butt and build confidence one small win at a time. No need to summit the whole mountain today - just aim for the next ridge.

Here's some handy ways to break it up:

- Don't sit and learn all at once - break learning time into 10 minute chunks.
- Shift gears: maybe your first 10 minutes is three letter words, the next four letter words, etc...
- Use visuals, like a checklist, stickers, or charts, to help your kids *see* what they've accomplished

#3: Wiggle, Stretch, Refocus

Those 10-minute chunks need a little something in between - and movement is the magic. Even grownups can't sit and work for too long without getting the dreaded brain fog, so Imagine how challenging it must be for our squirmy little babies to sit still and *focus*!

Movement breaks are a great way to refocus and re-energize your child for the next round of learning. Here are a few of my go-to wiggle breaks:

- Play a silly song and do a silly dance (parent participation optional, but highly recommended)
- For the less silly kids, do some basic stretches or quick jumping jacks
- Try some kid-friendly yoga poses, like cat/cow or tree pose
- Get creative with animal walks - hop like a bunny, crawl like a crab, or stomp like a dinosaur

Be sure to stay in and around your learning space - too much movement can easily top over into full-on playtime.

#4: Create a Learning Space That Works

Kids focus best when they're in a distraction free zone, and can more easily shift into "learning mode" if they have a familiar place to work.

Let your child help design the space, - if they feel ownership, they'll be more motivated to want to use it!

To keep it focus friendly, try the following:

- Keep it consistent, clutter free, good lighting, and away from noise
- Gear up with fidget toys
- Let your kiddo pick out their most favorite comfy chair
- Have them add a few personal touches (within reason) - remember, avoiding clutter and distractions is crucial!

#5: Encourage, Encourage, Encourage

Learning to focus is TOUGH, and kids should be rewarded for all the hard work they put in. The key is to praise their effort as well as their accomplishments, and remind them that their hard work is seen and celebrated.

Here's some tips to positively reinforce that focused behavior, while avoiding pressuring your kid:

- Verbally praise them when they work through hard tasks, like "I love how you kept trying, even when it got really hard."
- Celebrate small wins with tiny rewards - a piece of candy, a high five, or a sticker.
- Rewards are cool, bribes are NOT - avoid making a deal with your kid, such as "Read this and I'll buy you McDonalds."

#6: Most Importantly, Don't Yell, Don't Pressure.

Nothing kills focus harder than self-defeat. And nothing makes a kid feel more defeated than a parent standing over them, hollering about how all their hard work isn't good enough. That would make anyone wanna give up, not just a kid.

Here's some things to keep in mind during learning sessions, that'll help your kiddo to stay focused and motivated:

- Have patience and compassion when they struggle.
- Ask how you can help instead of pushing them to finish.
- Encourage reflection: "What do you already understand? What's tricky?"
- Let them know you're their ally in all this, and that it's perfectly okay if they don't get it right away.

If this feels like a lot (see, overwhelm sucks, doesn't it?), don't stress. You don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do everything on this list to make a difference.

Start off by picking just one strategy to try - maybe a pre-learning ritual, or a comfy learning space - and see how it goes. Then, little by little, you can start adding in other little changes, like sprucing up the space or trying out those wiggle breaks. Small steps add up.

The MOST important thing - **be there for your kid**. Show them that you care about them, and their learning. The more supported your child feels, the easier it'll be for them to learn. Y'all got this.