

A Closer Look at Habits of Mind: Focusing attention to pursue an interest, gratify curiosity, respond to a challenge, or try out an idea

Traits: The child ...

- Engages – slows down and notices detail
- Manages distractions – knows where to focus and what to ignore
- Harnesses impulsivity – self-regulates and delays gratification
- Persists – doesn't give up easily
- Works/plays with intention and purpose

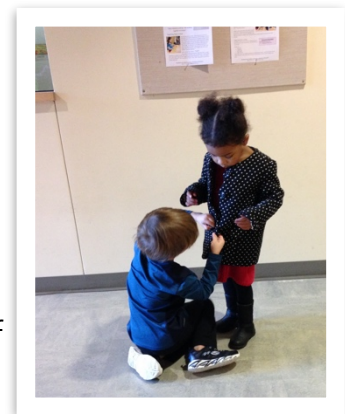


Supporting the Emergence of Focused Attention

Ask yourself...



- Where am I seeing children sustain their attention for longer periods of time? Initially, you may need to look outside of classroom activities. Maybe a child is absorbed by running warm water over their hands at the sink or you notice, when playing outside, that a child is seeking to conquer the monkey bars.
- What might I plan that will encourage children to look closely? Some children will be captivated by the details found in nature. Complex Lego structures or play with small parts may entrance others.
- How does children's helping behavior reveal persistence and slowing down? Where might I capture examples to share with the classroom community? Consider planning specifically for two. Start with highly motivating activities and identify partnerships that maximize success (children that know each other well or play/explore well with others). Gradually increase the complexity of the invitations and the challenge of the dyads with ample sharing and discussion of successful strategies.
- What could I read? Use a children's picture book, such as *Hurry Up!* by Dopirak & Neal (2020), to think together about what it feels like to slow down and bring one's attention into focus on the world around.



Focusing Attention: Language to notice, spotlight, and reflect!

What you are doing right now is called *focus*. I am noticing that you are... (traits)

- slowing down
- noticing details
- knowing where to focus
- ignoring distractions
- showing self-control
- persisting, not giving up
- showing your persist powers!
- [have] a plan in mind (purpose and intention)

I have noticed that you are supporting your learning/exploration by _____(trait).

I can see that you are really feeling _____but you are in control of your body (keeping your body safe, taking care of yourself).

It looks like you are feeling _____ right now. What could you do to take care of yourself?

I notice that you are really involved in your work. Would you like to share your plan/thinking? What did you discover?



Notes on Assessing Children's Expression of Focusing Attention

Most importantly, Focusing Attention is not the same as children complying with directions provided by an adult. Compliance with adult direction is more likely when children have the capacity to pay attention, but attentional focus will not emerge on demand.

Further, because the Habits of Mind are neurological capabilities, they exist somewhere in a child's life. If you have not yet seen focused attention in the classroom or program setting (the child is on the move, checking things out but not yet engaging), expand your search to other spaces in a child's life. Observe the child at drop off and pick up. Ask the family members about the child's favorite activities. Where do they seem to slow down, persist, and ignore distractions?

Finally, when a child's focused attention begins to emerge in your environment, you may notice that the focus is sustained only with particular materials or during a particular time of day. Resist the urge to limit access to the favorite item or activity in the interests of giving them a wide range of experiences. For some children, their capacity for focusing attention, while fragile, will steep and grow stronger in interaction with the favorite item or experience (A rating of **Becoming**). Be alert for moments when the child's focus (their persistence, their ability to slow down) begins to extend to other experiences, materials, or play partners.