



# Getting engaged!

Attention and engagement workshop

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## A bit about me

- Paediatric OT and volunteer with Gympanzees.
- Working with children who have neurological differences for around 28 years.
- Have specialist post-graduate training in Cerebral Palsy, ASD, Dyspraxia (DCD), ADHD, Brain Injury, Sensory Processing Disorders.
- Interested in finding ways to enhance the quality of life, having fun and increasing participation - in family life, learning and community activities- for all the youngsters I meet.



As a therapist, my underpinning goals often include:

For youngsters living with ASD, ADHD and Learning Difficulties to increase in their internal motivation, persistence, flow of engagement with activities and to build their flexibility/ imaginative thinking.

For youngsters living with physical movement challenges, I will work to build their resilience and efficiency of the effort they use, to be optimally successful- I'll adapt the task, the environment (including how others support or prompt them) as well as supporting them to practice new ways to move that are more efficient and successful.

# What makes us get engaged...?!

- Learning to juggle- it's fair to say that I'm not a "natural"!
- My motivation:  
It would be cool...!  
I've done something creative with lockdown
- My son is teaching me  
He gives me feedback, analyses where I'm going wrong and makes suggestions, reminds me to practice...



## Let's explore this a bit:

- **Internal motivators:**

I'd like to be able to do something cool! This interests me

I'd like people to be impressed and think I've done something worthwhile with my time in lockdown...!?! I'm aware of others' opinions about me

I'd like my son to know that he's done a good job. Theory of Mind



- **External motivators:**

Feedback- the right thing at the right time

Takes over when my internal motivation is flagging a bit (feeling like I'm rubbish at this!)- persistence, resilience, reframes negatives into positives, diffuses my annoyance!

**I wouldn't be doing any of this if I wasn't interested or could see the point/purpose for me or someone else!**

## Types of Attention:



While dining in a crowded restaurant, individuals use **selective attention** to focus on what they are doing.



Sweeping a floor or otherwise focusing on a single task for an extended period of time requires **sustained attention**.



Cooks use **alternating attention** when reading a recipe and then preparing a dish.



Simultaneously performing multiple activities, such as talking on the phone, surfing the internet and caring for a child, uses **divided attention**.

## Hyperfocus and Attention Switching

- A person's ability to hone in on a specific task, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else.
- Hyperfocus is sometimes described as “flow”. It's when you become fully engaged in a challenging activity you enjoy. You shut out the rest of the world and even lose track of time. People who have ADHD and ASD have trouble breaking out of it and **switching their attention** to something else.
- Screen time seems to be a particularly easy way for someone to slip into hyperfocus. Video games, television, or social media can take up hours of time.
- Hyperfocus is more likely to occur when you are engaged in a task that is challenging, that matters to you, and in which you make progress.

- One approach is to take a neurological perspective as Dr Michael Rosenthal, Neuropsychologist describes: “There is a part of the brain, the **frontal lobe**, that is underperforming in kids with ADHD (& ASD) and as a consequence their reward systems are a little bit funky,” he says. “So they’ll get in to something and that thing is **so rewarding for them that it’s hard for them to shift their attention** to something else.”
- The other way to look at hyperfocus is as a **behavioural** one, following from the work of psychologist and ADHD researcher Russell Barkley. In this view, youngsters have **trouble exerting control over the depth of their attention**, in the same way that they often have trouble controlling/ grading their physical actions.



## How children with neurological differences may view our brilliant activity ideas....

**“Nah, you’re all right....”** I don’t understand your motivation and it isn’t important/ relevant to me.

### **Flexibility of thinking affects internal motivations:**

I can’t imagine what this is about or how I might feel when I’m doing it. It isn’t what I usually do and I’m anxious about how new things feel in my body or fit with the order of my daily routines.

### **Theory of Mind and coherence:**

I love you but I don’t realise this is important for you. Your idea of fun isn’t mine- I don’t realise how we can work together on this...

### **“Just right” challenge...?**

That’s too hard for me- I won’t be able to do it.



# Children with neurological challenges

## ASD, ADHD, Learning Difficulties:

Often have issues that place limits on their flexibility of thinking, imagination, anticipating things in a fixed or narrow way, don't see the "play potential" in opportunities.

Their **internal feedback** relates to :

Does it feel right, look right, have a familiar (safe) pattern of events, sounds or visuals?

Does it relate to my special interest?

Can I sustain my focus and ignore the competing distractors from my own thoughts and feelings or from the world around me?

Often quite **disconnected with external motivators** relating to other people. Might be strongly influenced by obtaining something relating to special interests or strong sensory feelings (ie obtaining an internal motivator!)



## Movement and physical challenges:

My **internal motivation and effort** does not equate to:

Outcome, success, what I hoped would happen, what others can do...

I've learned to gain satisfaction from watching (vicarious play)...

I might be fed up with being rewarded for effort rather than success!

I've done this baby-ish thing before. Give me something age-appropriate!

**But-** just a small amount of success will **give me feedback** about how to move my body next time- I'll need lots of repetitions to learn a new skill though (latest research indicates 14-25 hours of practice enables new functional skills to be learned).

## So, let's join their world and lead the way...

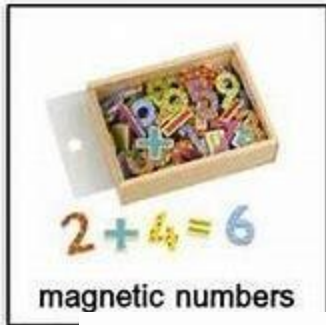
### Taking an “alongside them” approach:

- Simply join in what they are doing-copy the movements and sounds. Wait until they notice what you're doing and acknowledge (smile, or say “driving/ tapping/ bouncing”). Look up intensive interaction for more details
- Then expand or sabotage playfully- eg get in their way, make the train crash etc. “Oh oh! Silly/funny me! Can you fix it?”
- Have a contingency plan – i.e. be ready with wipes or warn that things may go wrong but you can fix it.
- Once you've expanded what they can tolerate, bring in an activity of your choice and play it alongside them- wait for them to notice and add simple comments (“building, marble is rolling” etc). Hand part to them or place their hand on part of the activity to prompt their engagement.
- Use gentle praise or repeat the phrase used to describe the activity- it's important that their action or the activity has a “label”.

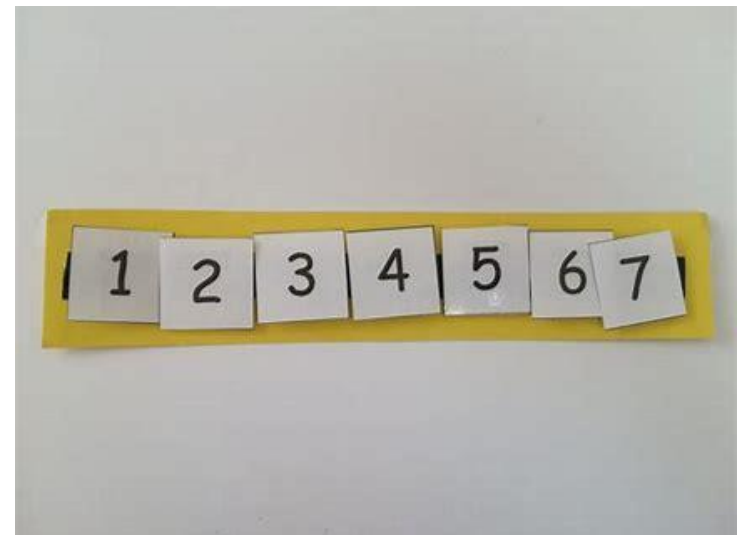
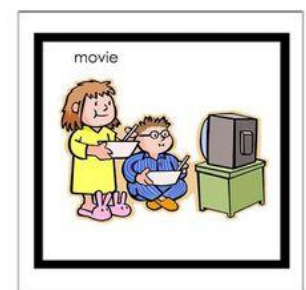
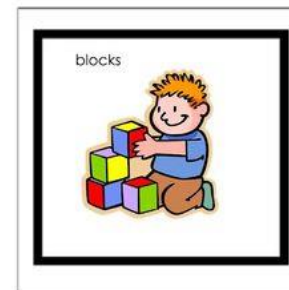
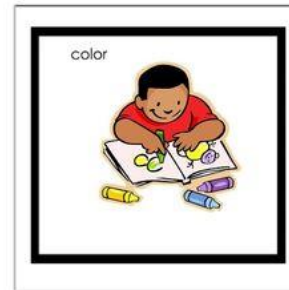
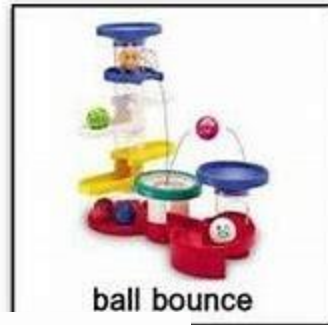
## Taking a visual scheduling approach:

- This can take time but is worth it!
- Take photos if you don't have symbols

### First



### Then



## Visual Scheduling

- Choose easy task first, then the harder task you want them to try, and then their easy task/ thing they like 'then'.
- Take pictures of what they need to do and go through it before the activity so they can visualise what they need to do.
- Visual can be clearer than words so use both to describe what is going to happen to make it easier to understand.
- Check 'Pyramid' online courses for free.

## Taking a reward-based approach:

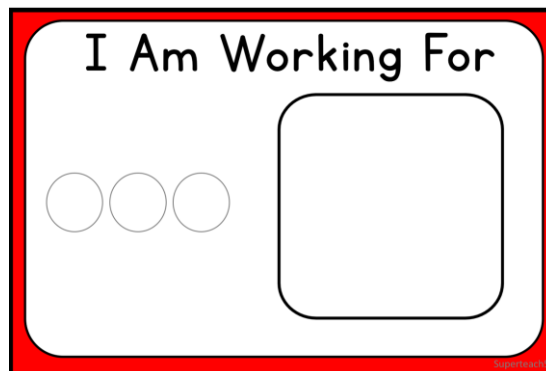
This links an external motivator with the youngster's interests and internal motivators.

They should exchange their board for the reward

Need to get the reward to them between 2-5 seconds later.

Mix up the reward so it isn't always the same thing.

The aim would be for the youngster to enjoy the sensations and routine associated with the activities so that they are less anxious about them, accept them as part of their routines and are successful = new internal motivation to complete the task without needing an external reward.



## Some practical ideas:

Make a list of what your child likes to do and is interested in- are they happiest doing practical every-day tasks such as washing up or joining in with others? Do they have special characters they like that can be your assistants in tasks etc? Is food the way in?

Take photos of you, teddy/ superhero doing the task- create a sequence and use this as a narrative/ story

Do the activity yourself first, make it a bit silly, funny, eye catching... before telling them it's their turn!

Make it less challenging:

Put feely stuff in a zip lock bag first.

Fully support all but the last step so they are successful from their own efforts- (backward chaining). Then move on so they do more and more of it but you are always starting until they do it all themselves.





Remove distractors: use a plain background, remove other sounds or have gentle unobtrusive sound that dampens down the effect of other noise. Use ear defenders etc.

Movement increases vocalisations, attention level- be active with your child before introducing something new.

Where are you doing it? In the play tunnel, standing up, under the weighted blanket, on the trampoline...?

Ensure there's feedback that they understand and find motivating but not distracting:

Clapping quietly, saying "good posting/ building", give a back rub, give a thumbs up, place a token on their reward chart.

Let them mess about and do random actions with the activity- that's play and a sign that they are exploring in their own way.

If chewing everything, say 'out' and, after initial exploration, scoop it away from their mouth and model how to play with it. May be good to have something else in their mouth while they play with the object.

## Discussion Suggestions:

Can we influence what attracts the attention and interest for our youngsters?

What approaches have made it possible for your child to be more successful or to engage for longer?

Do reward charts and timers work in your home?

How do you stay motivated? What feedback helps you to keep going?

Are there simple, practical ways we can share, to help keep track of small steps of progress, that help us to stay encouraged?