

**🗹 Neuro Developmental Conditions Pathway**

Attention

## What is considered as Normal Attention Span?

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| **Age** | **What to expect** | **Methods that can be used to improve attention** |
| 3 years | A pre-schooler working alone may spend 3-8 minutes on an interesting activity and may finish it if it’s easy. | Look for ways to keep pre-schoolers interested in the activities they start.  Encourage and follow their interests. Avoid distracting them or taking over the activities. |
| 3½ years | Working alone, a pre-schooler can stay busy for 15 minutes if there are a variety of interesting choices. |
| 4 years | By 4, a child engrossed in an activity may ignore distractions such as the call to dinner.  Alone, the 4-year-old may spend 7-8 minutes on a single activity, or as much as 15 minutes if the activity is new and especially interesting (an eye exam, for example).  With a small group, a 4-year-old may spend 5-10 minutes playing without interruption. | Four-year-olds understand it is harder to pay attention to uninteresting tasks, or when distracted by noise or their own thoughts.  They are more likely to stay interested when they’re comfortable with the task or project and feel successful. They may need help to meet their standards.  Adults can also keep children interested in projects with impromptu games and humour. |
| 4½ years | Working alone, the pre-kindergartener may spend 2-3 minutes on a task chosen by an adult such as getting dressed or picking up toys. |
| 5 years | By 5, most children can ignore minor distractions. Alone, they will focus on a single interesting activity for 10 or 15 minutes and on an assigned task for 4-6 minutes if it’s easy and interesting. A small group of children can work or play together without interruption for 10-25 minutes. | Recognise that personal interest remains the most important motivation for 5-year-olds. It will double the length of their attention span. |
| 6 years | Working alone on a single activity, a 6-year-old may stay interested in as much as 30 minutes. | Continue to build on children’s interests and stay alert to difficult tasks, so that you can help. |

## How can inattention be spotted?

In children where there is concern about reduced attention, the following may be observed:

* Fail to pay close attention to details or make careless mistakes in schoolwork
* Have trouble staying focused in tasks or play
* Appear not to listen, even when spoken to directly
* Have difficulty following through on instructions and fail to finish schoolwork or chores
* Have trouble organizing tasks and activities
* Avoid or dislike tasks that require focused mental effort, such as homework
* Lose items needed for tasks or activities, for example, toys, school assignments, pencils
* Be easily distracted
* Forget to do some daily activities, such as forgetting to do chores

Inattention can be present in the following:

* Suspected ADHD
* Anxiety, hypervigilance, and associated restlessness
* Anxiety triggered by Sensory Sensitivity secondary to Autism (e.g. overload of sounds, light)
* Sensory seeking behaviors secondary to Autism (need for touch, pressure, fiddle)
* Poor sleep
* Feeling hungry and physically unwell

## How is ADHD diagnosed?

For a child to receive a diagnosis of ADHD, your child must have started showing symptoms of inattention in their early childhood and the behaviors must be taking place in more than one situation (at school and at home, for example).

Also, your child’s difficulties must be intense enough to significantly harm their social interactions or academic performance. These symptoms also shouldn’t be due to a physical problem such as hearing loss or poor vision.