

Chatter Pack

Attention & Listening

Task focus boards - Support to
maintain attention during tasks

This ChatterPack includes three **Task Focus boards**, and **Equipment Checklist** and a **Reward Card**. It also contains simple suggestions to try when using the resources.

These are aimed at supporting children to maintain or redirect attention during learning tasks and the support can be individualised by using the level most suited to the child or young person's needs.

If you suspect that a child's difficulties could be the result of an underlying mental health, developmental or sensory issue, or if you need support to adapt the following suggestions, speak to the child's parents, educational and/or medical professionals and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

Why use a Task Board or Checklist?

Visuals are extremely popular and many young people draw great benefit from them. However, using a Task board or checklist alongside, or in place of other visuals can help support children in a more focused way and this approach might be more suited to the needs of children with attention difficulties.

It can be tricky for children and young people to follow spoken instructions and for those who have attention difficulties, it is highly likely that they will also struggle with auditory memory and working memory.

Auditory memory and working memory involve the processing and retention of what has been said and the ability to hold onto the information long enough to act on it, sometimes at various stages throughout the duration of a task. Therefore, those who struggle with these skills might only remember parts of what they are told, or perhaps none of it at all. These are quite difficult skills to improve, therefore focusing on strategies which will support them to achieve, might be more appropriate. The Directing Attention Boards present information sequentially and support attention, memory and processing skills by using visual skills, which is widely considered to be the most effective method.

Always keeping progress in mind, you can support the child to keep developing skills using the boards. Once they demonstrate consistent understanding and success using the level 1 board, you could try moving them on to using the level 2 board, and then on again to using the level 3 board. Alternatively, if more appropriate, you could start by using the level 2 or level 3 boards.

Equipment Checklist

Children and young people with attention difficulties might find it tricky to organise equipment needed for tasks. They might also struggle with the transition from one task to another. The Equipment Checklist could help to support development and practice of these skills.

This board is designed to use alongside the Task Focus Board (1) however it might be more appropriate for the child to first master using each board separately before using both together.

If you are able to laminate the board, using an erasable pen, try writing each step of the task directly into the sections. Alternatively, try using sticky notes to add to the sections and simply replace them when updating the board.

Using the checklist

Equipment checklist

1.

2.

3.

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- Choose the board which is best suited to child or young person you are working with
- List the equipment needed for the task in the first section. Keep the number of items to a minimum and if possible, use single words

Children who struggle with reading might benefit from images to use with the board.

If you are able to laminate the board, using an erasable pen, try writing each step of the task directly into the sections. Alternatively, try using sticky notes to add to the sections and simply replace them with the next three steps when updating the board.

- Read the list to the child and point to each word as you say it. Check understanding and ask the child to repeat back to you what they need to locate.
- Before you begin, explain how the Equipment Checklist works and make sure that the child understands. Keep your language simple and specific. For example, gesture towards the board and ask 'what are you going to find first?'

Confirm that the child understands the vocabulary needed to complete the task. You can do this by simply asking the child to label items as you point towards them. However, many children and young people respond more effectively when asked questions using a less direct method. For example, rather than pointing at an item and asking "what is it?" you could try adopting a questioning tone of voice and whilst pointing at an item, say 'It's a.....?' Or, point to an item and using an enthusiastic tone of voice, you could say 'I found a.....!'

- Next, encourage the child to locate items on list in sequence from the first to the last. Keep your language simple and specific. For example, gesture towards the board and ask, 'what you are going to find first?' Or use a sentence starter such as: 'first you're going to find.....?'

When supporting or monitoring the child's progress with the task, try to simply gesture towards the board rather than explicitly pointing to, or labelling items on the list. This will ensure any additional support is introduced gradually, and only if the child requires it. As the child locates an item on the list, you could encourage them to cross it out, or, if you have laminated the checklist, they could erase it from the list. This might help to remove unnecessary distractions and encourage the child to focus on the remaining equipment required.

Task Focus Board (1)

In order to successfully follow a verbal instruction, it isn't necessary for us to retain and process every word. Instead, we naturally identify and retain only the important, or 'key words', something which children and young people with attention difficulties can find very tricky. Therefore, it is likely the child might require support to not only recall the details within instructions, but also with separating the stages of a task into small, achievable steps and then to sequence them accurately.

Using Task Focus board (1)

Name:	Task:
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Start by writing the first three steps into the sections on the board. Some children require new skills to be built up very slowly, therefore try to keep the language used to describe each step, short, specific, and achievable.

Children who struggle to read might benefit from images to use with the board, rather than written instructions.

If you are able to laminate the board, using an erasable pen, try writing each step of the task directly into the sections. Alternatively, try using sticky notes to add to the sections and simply replace them with the next three steps when updating the board.

- Before you begin, explain to the purpose of the Task focus Board and make sure that the child understands what they are being asked to do. Keep your language simple and specific. For example, gesture towards the board and ask, 'what you are going to do first?'
- To reduce distraction, once the child completes a step, you could encourage them to cross it out. Alternatively, if you have laminated the board, they could simply erase it.

If the child requires support to refocus within the task, rather than explicitly pointing to, or repeating the instruction verbally, simply gesture towards the board and ask "what do you need to do next?" Adopting this approach will encourage the child to seek support by using the prompts on the board and can be much more effective when developing skills of switching and maintaining attention than verbal repetition of what they need to do. It will also ensure that any additional support is introduced gradually and monitored closely.

- When all three steps have been completed, either reset the board immediately by adding the next three steps, or, if you are using a reward to support motivation, you could reset the board during their reward time.

There are ideas for adding motivation and using rewards in the Top Tips section.

Task Focus Board (2)

Once the child has demonstrated success and consistent understanding using Task Focus Board (1), try using a Task Focus Board (2). This stage is aimed at combining and further developing skills learned at the previous stage and can be used alongside the Equipment Checklist.

Using Task Focus board (2)

The form is titled 'Task Focus Board (2)' and is enclosed in a dashed teal border. It is divided into several sections:

- Name:** A box with a dotted line for writing.
- Task:** A box with a dotted line for writing.
- Equipment checklist:** A box with the text 'Equipment checklist:' and three dotted lines for writing. A dashed arrow points from the title above to the first dotted line.
- Step 1:** A box containing the number '1.' and a small teal square checkbox on the right.
- Step 2:** A box containing the number '2.' and a small teal square checkbox on the right.
- Step 3:** A box containing the number '3.' and a small teal square checkbox on the right.
- Step 4:** A box containing the number '4.' and a small red square checkbox on the right.

At the bottom left of the form, the website address www.chatterpack.net is printed.

- Begin by reading the steps and tips within the Task Focus Board (1) section.
- Ascertain the child's understanding of the task by asking simple questions. If the child's description adequately represents what they are being asked to do, support them to identify four main stages of the process. They can then be encouraged or supported to write these onto the board.
- If the child is unable to adequately describe the task, or to identify the sequence of steps required to complete it, they might benefit from support in these areas before moving them onto using Task Focus Board (2)
- Repeat the task to the child and ask them to indicate which are 'key words' or phrases they might need to remember. If they are unable to do this, you might wish to seek assessment or advice from a speech and language therapist to determine if they have any difficulties impacting this skill. For

example, with auditory memory, auditory processing, receptive or expressive language skills etc.

- If you are to write the steps onto the board, remember to use short, specific phrases. Reducing the amount which a child must read and process will help to focus their attention onto the task; and by demonstrating how to construct notes, you will encourage development of skills which they require to complete the boards independently in the future.
- Once complete, show the child the board and ask simple questions to ensure they understand what is expected of them. For example, gesture towards the board and ask, 'what you are going to do first?'
- Confirm that the child understands the instruction by asking them to reword it. This will also demonstrate if they understand the vocabulary used or required to complete the task.

Many children and young people respond more effectively when asked questions using an indirect method. For example, rather than explicitly asking them to put the instruction into their own words, you could try providing them with prompt words throughout the sentence, for example, "the....is....to....because...." etc.

Or, you could try using sentence starters, "The man is going to" Or, if the child doesn't provide enough information, you could try questioning by using words such as "because....?" adopting a questioning tone of voice and whilst pointing at an item, say 'It's a.....?' Or, point to an item and using an enthusiastic tone of voice, you could say 'I found a.....'.

- Each time the child completes a step, encourage them to cross it out, or if you have laminated the board, they could erase it. By reducing distractions in this way you can help to promote their focus on current stages of the task.
- If the child requires support to refocus within the task, rather than explicitly pointing to, or repeating the instruction verbally, simply gesture towards the board and ask "what do you need to do next?"

By avoiding the use of explicit instructions, you will encourage the child to seek support by using the prompts on the board and can be much more effective when developing skills of switching and maintaining attention than verbal repetition of what they need to do. It will also ensure that any additional support is introduced gradually and monitored closely.

- When all four steps have been completed, either reset the board immediately or, if you are using a reward to support motivation, you could reset the board during their reward time. There are ideas on adding motivation and using rewards in the Top Tips section.

Task Focus Board (3)

Once the child demonstrates consistent understanding and success using Equipment Checklist and Task Focus Boards (1) and (2) you could try replacing with the Task Focus Board (3).

This board combines the Task Focus Board (2) and the Equipment Checklist which might be more appropriate for some children and young people who continue to need support with organisation before and support to maintain focus, during a task. Using the board.

Using Task Focus Board (3)

The diagram shows a 'Task Focus Board (3)' form. At the top, there are two fields: 'Name:' and 'Task:'. Below these are four rows, each starting with a number (1, 2, 3, 4) and ending with a small square checkbox. A dashed arrow points from the title 'Using Task Focus Board (3)' to the 'Task:' field.

Name:	Task:
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>

More instructions and tips for introducing and using this board can be found within the Equipment Checklist section and within the Task Focus Board (2) section.

- Ask the child what equipment they think they might need and prompt them by reminding of them of the task. You could also encourage them to observe others or to look for 'clues'.
- If appropriate, ask the child to write the equipment needed for the task in the correct section on the board.

Praise any attempt the child makes to use the boards independently. If they make a mistake, rather than saying 'no' or using other negative language, you could try using a positive phrase, such as 'good try'. Using positive language phrased in such a way will let them know they were not correct, but it will also encourage motivation to keep trying.

- If the child is developing the ability to identify key information within instructions, repeat the instruction and emphasise the key words. Always 'chunk' information and after each part, ask the child to summarise what you have said.

Identifying key information can be very tricky for some children and might require explicit teaching. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to work on these skills at another time.

- Together, identify four key stages of the task which the child is required to complete and if the child is able, ask them to write them onto the board. If they forget one of the stages, prompt them by repeating the previous stage and ask what might come next. You could try using sentence starters, or you could provide them with a key word to help trigger their memory.
- Once the board is complete, make sure the child understands what they need to do, by asking them to describe each stage to you. Try to avoid pointing to each stage and observe whether they are able to sequence and maintain their attention at this stage.

To reduce distractions remind them to cross out or, if you have laminated the board, erase each stage once they have completed it.

- It's important to always monitor and review the support we give to children and young people, however, it is vital to do so at specific stages, such as when they are successfully and appropriately using new skills. Although this is likely to boost motivation and enthusiasm, it is not an indication that they need support to be reduced ceased, however it's likely to be an indication that any support they receive requires adaption in order to encourage further development and generalisation of those skills.
- A simple method of assessing support required, is to provide instructions or an explanation and then do nothing. Wait or pause to see what the child can do independently and then increase support gradually. For example, if the child cannot recall what they needed to do, try using a facial expression, or an 'expectant look' rather than gesturing towards their board. This will alert them to know that they need to do something, but it will also give them an opportunity to figure out exactly what that is on their own.
- Alternatively, you could reduce support by adapting the language which you use. For example, if the child cannot remember what to do next, rather than gesturing towards the board, try asking them what they think they could try, or what they should do? If they still cannot remember, you might raise support gradually by looking towards the board, or further still by offering them two choices.

Top Tips when using the boards

- The Reward Card can be used to symbolise the motivational part of using the board. For some children, it can be helpful to have one familiar image which reminds them that a reward is coming, but which doesn't distract them from the task at hand.
- Ask the child what they need to remember during the task. This might be a behaviour expectation, such as putting their hand up to ask a question, or it might be related to an academic target, such as remembering to use capital letters, or punctuation.

- Ending a motivating 'reward' activity can be very tricky for some children. So, to support the transition, you could try using timers and/or a verbal countdown.
 - Tasks which require sustained attention are likely to be the most difficult. However, it can be helpful to begin such tasks with a fun, listening or movement activity.
 - Children with attention difficulties often benefit from expectations and explanations being demonstrated and modelled
 - Short, achievable tasks are likely to result in the greatest amount of learning.
 - When information or instructions are presented verbally, it can be helpful to 'chunk' them into smaller sections. It can also be helpful to use pauses and to emphasise key words or phrases.
 - If you need to explain how to complete a step, do so in simple terms, avoiding complex language. Also avoid complex questions such as those requiring reasoning, justifying, inferencing or prediction skills. For example, "How do you know?" "What might happen if...?" "How do you think they feel?" "Why do you think they.....?"
 - In order for the child to engage with the boards and complete the steps, especially if it's something they really don't want to do, adding a reward could be useful. However, it's important to make sure that any reward activity or item is motivating, engaging and fun.

This resource is designed to be used as a part of a wider approach rather than in isolation. For more resources, information tips and advice, you can find us at

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Equipment checklist

Equipment checklist	
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Task Focus Board (1)

Name:	Task:
.....
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Task Focus Board (2)

Name:	Equipment checklist:
Task:	
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Task Focus Board (3)

Name:	Task:
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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