

Biblical perspective *for gaining and maintaining attention*

First of all, God calls us to be compassionate, patient and gentle in our interactions with others, including children. Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:12-17, 4:6, II Tim. 2:24-26, I Peter 3:7, I Tim. 5:2 If we are to treat others in an “understanding way,” let’s try to place ourselves in a child’s shoes. Here are some of the variables that factor into a child’s challenge for maintaining attention.

The Nature of Children (typically)

- Children are easily excitable, reactive and distractible. They are usually loaded and ready for an exciting adventure.
- Children are curious about things they have not experienced or seen before.
- Children will naturally mimic or model speech, behaviors and attitudes.
- Children are sensitive and feelings can be hurt without a major reason.
- Children are naturally competitive and will compare themselves with others.
- Children usually learn best by moving, touching, exploring and making discoveries, not by sitting still and listening for extended periods of time. They are designed to move and talk.
- Children are language acquisition ready.
- Children are adaptable and moldable.
- All children are born with a sinful nature (just like you and I).

Influences on a Child’s Body

- Sleep or the lack of sleep
- Blood sugar levels
- Thirst
- Need to go to the bathroom
- Being touched, pushed, brushed, pressed
- Sensorimotor developmental rates
- Unique orientations of the nervous and musculoskeletal systems

Environmental/Cultural Influences on a Child

- Adult expectations
- Physical restraints
- Unfair situations
- Peer pressure

Now, considering all these variables leads us to wonder how children **do** give attention to taking in new information? With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, these variables can be engineered into our lesson plans and approaches to factor outcomes for attaining and maintaining attention.

By recognizing these variables, incorporating them in our methods in modest portions, monitoring and even blocking others, we as instructors can utilize these influences on children.

Negative influences can be removed by

- Not crowding children in their seating arrangement
- Giving regular bathroom and drinking fountain breaks
- Avoiding sugary treats and offer more healthy snacks (Be aware of food allergies!)
- Separating children who have a history of igniting conflict when in close proximity to one another. (It does not necessarily mean that they don't like each other.)
- Allowing children to know what to expect ie: how long they will need to listen even though that may be obvious to the teacher. (The child will assume that a 2-minute instruction will take at least an hour.) Tip: utilize the analytical child to time you and hold you accountable.
- Avoiding unrealistic expectations
- Providing reasonable boundaries
- Admitting that fairness is not always in our control. However, the goal is to be just and merciful.
- Discouraging peer pressure
- Not setting kids up for failure, e.g.: having the group to do something that requires coordination. Allow an acceptable "out" for the children who would be embarrassed to try it.

Interest in your lesson can be sparked by

- Arranging your lessons to create curiosity, a little mystery to be solved, something hidden to be uncovered.
- Try a different approach such as using black paper with chalk instead of marker pens and white paper or taping paper underneath their table or chair and have them write/draw laying on their backs.
- Use their sensitivity to help them identify with the characters in your story.
- Refocus their attention by making the presentation more interesting than other distractions. (example: lit lightening bugs in a jar or matryoshka dolls) Do the unexpected but still maintain appropriateness and control. The goal is to gain attention, not to catapult them into oblivion.
- Plan and prepare for moving, touching, exploring and making discoveries in your lessons.
- Provide designated times when it's ok to talk, run and play in reasonable boundaries.
- Allowing them to make changes in their environment.

Reinforce learning by

- Catching kids making the right choices, giving attention, and being ready
- Using another language to learn a song, count or label
- Expecting the best. Let them try learning a "hard word." They usually like the challenge and feel successful. This works well also when they are asked to come up with a rhyming word.
- Providing sensorimotor opportunities for the kids who need to move and touch and press.
- Finding out how the learning-challenged child learns best from parents and teachers. Utilize those familiar items, people and techniques which are appropriate for your setting with parent permission.

Check your attitude

Our attitudes are not always as invisible as we assume them to be. Kids pick up on anger, frustration, unfriendliness, coolness, pride and so forth. They will not be open to changing their attitudes or choices if you are approaching them with any of these negative attitudes.

Also, if you haven't given priority to properly prepare for your lesson, they usually pick up on it and you've lost their attention. They will compare your knowledge base with theirs. Therefore, do not approach them with the "I know and you don't know" attitude or you will end up with a competition instead of a heart for learning.

Introduce them to the Forgiver

(Use the Apple Gospel Weaving Wheel as an example)

God has designed children for learning in such wonderful ways that it can take place without our even noticing. They can listen sometimes even better if they are allowed to move when they receive new information.

God has a design for growing, developing and learning. Dr. Mel Levine, a renown learning disabilities researcher, likes to use a cockpit of an airplane with all of its dials and controls as a visual to discuss with the child the various types of controls that we need to exert over our bodies to maintain attention for learning no matter what our age which is very helpful to understand self-control.

However, keep in mind that we can "work the flesh" to pay attention, but the real success is the mind's redemption. Self-control is the culminating fruit of God's Spirit.

A good resource is an article that you can review and study online at:

<https://bible.org/article/preparing-hear-god's-word>