

Focus

The aspect of Intellectual Character on which School will focus more closely in the coming half term will be 'Focus'.

Being able to focus productively on an activity is the willingness to be careful, accurate and thorough. It involves paying attention to detail and avoiding silly mistakes. Concentration is central to maintaining good focus and becoming absorbed in what one is doing.

'Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus.' Alexander Graham Bell

The strength of our focus determines the degree to which we are susceptible to distraction. The less focus we have, the more distracted we will be. And when we are distracted, our purpose is compromised. Having a lot on your mind, feeling sleep deprived or hungry, or just being bored, are just some of the many things that can compromise concentration and rob a pupil of the motivation and ability to learn new information. Staying organised, maintaining good notes, and being prepared all aid focus. Slouching, surrounding yourself with distractions and being negative all detract from focus.

The Importance of Focus

Sports Psychologists have recognised for some time that there is one factor that forms the foundation of a person's ability to perform at their best; their ability to focus and control their focus of attention effectively. Research has estimated that the average attention span of young people has dropped from between 10 to 12 minutes in the 1980s to about 7 to 8 minutes at the turn of the century, just 20 years later, and in the space of a generation.

People who are able to focus achieve more and feel more in control of their lives. Those that lack focus cite difficulties in being able to finish tasks and struggle to manage their time effectively.

Managing Distraction

The advantages of being able to focus on a task whilst ignoring other distractions enables a young person to confidently learn new skills or knowledge. However, the modern world provides fantastic devices that allow immediate access to information and resources. The speed at which young people process information on a daily basis often baffles grandparents. Some observers now consider the ability of a toddler to 'swipe a screen' or touch a web link to be an innate ability. For some young people this new way of life can present problems in their ability to forego immediate gratification of a computer game or TV boxset in favour of completing homework, revision, or learning to play a musical instrument or practice a sport. The lives of adolescents in the modern world are dominated by instant access to information that would have taken their parents hours or days to find out.

Devices that give immediate gratification can act as a distraction through their promise of a quicker reward of emotional satisfaction and interaction.

All unnecessary devices must be switched off during a period of focus on a task.

Exercises to Develop Focus

1. The number grid

This is a ten by ten grid containing numbers randomly arranged from 0 – 99. Each number occupies one random square in the grid. The task is to cross off numbers in order and increasing value from 0 – 99. The person who gets to the highest number in 90 seconds is able to demonstrate greatest concentration levels. Examples of number grids can be found online.

Focus



2. Stroop Test

This test displays several words that are colours, the words do not match the colour of the text.

For example:

Say the colour, NOT the word

PURPLE
GREEN
BLUE
GREEN
YELLOW

ORANGE
RED
BLACK
BLUE
ORANGE

BLUE
PURPLE
YELLOW
RED
GREY

The aim is to say the colour of the text and not read the word. People with greater focus are able to accurately complete the test more quickly. There are many versions of this online.

3. Games and Reading Books

Many games such as chess, card games and monopoly are excellent tools in developing focus. Reading books (and finishing them) also develop concentration span.

4. The 'Stork Stand'

This is a yoga exercise that requires the person (without touching any other object or person) to stand on one leg with arms raised perpendicular to the body. Beginners stand with eyes open, experts stand with eyes closed. People with greater focus are able to stand for longer periods of time.

5. Mindfulness

You may be aware that there is currently a high profile attached to the techniques of 'Mindfulness', and we have a meditation group within school as part of our extra curricular provision. There are many examples of the techniques associated with 'Mindfulness' available online.

With all of these activities, practice makes perfect!

Conclusion

The requirement to focus on a target or task at the expense of other distractions is probably more important now than ever. Simple and practical techniques can be used to develop attentional control and lengthen attention span. This development of focus must be accompanied by the self discipline to manage potential distraction by removing temptation from the immediate vicinity, when needed.

Having good focus is the difference between a teenager saying:

'I can't concentrate when other people walk into the room as I am more interested in what they have to say, even though I have a deadline to meet'

And

'I can get so engrossed in my work that people startle me because I didn't even hear them come into the room.'

Jason Slack
Headmaster

'Always remember, your focus determines your reality.' – George Lucas

