



STARS – Strategies Tips and Resources for Schools

Developing Attention

STARS is a resource created to save you time and includes strategies, tips, methods and practical advice for supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This resource provides adaptable advice for both Primary and Secondary settings, catering to the needs of your school and students.

Developing Attention

Developing Attention is a selection of ideas which uses information from Gina Davies, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist's, Attention Autism. Gina's primary objective is that the sessions are fun and "*offer an irresistible invitation to learn*" and aims to develop natural and spontaneous communication using visually based and highly motivating activities. This ethos is echoed through these suggestions for learners with and without a diagnosis of autism.

Aims of Developing Attention

- To have fun
- To connect with a young person
- To improve joint attention
- To enjoy shared group activities
- To boost attention in adult led activities
- To foster natural communication in an ordinary way
- To increase non-verbal and verbal communication
- To improve vocabulary

The Stages of Developing Attention

The Developing Attention programme progresses through a series of stages, building on each skill level. Each new stage is introduced when the group or child is ready to expand their attention skills.

Stage 1 – The What's in the Box/Bucket to help Develop Attention

A bucket/box is filled with visually engaging objects and toys, aiming to gain the shared attention of the group. The leader starts by singing a song to gain their attention and then pulls out an item one at a time, sharing it with group. Use simple repetitive



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vocabulary to comment on the object. You can sing the same song between each item. This stage should be short and simply gain their attention, usually 2 or 3 items. Ensure throughout this stage the bucket/box and everything inside is **yours**, the children only **watch** and **don't** touch the objects. If they attempt to touch or get up from their seats, stop the engagement in the toy, wait, and a supporting staff member will lead them to sit back down, preferably non-verbally. The aims of the bucket sessions are for the pupils to: focus attention on the leading adult and their agenda and engage attention with enthusiasm.

Stage 2 – The Attention Builder to Hold Attention

A visually stimulating activity is shown to the group by the leader, aiming to sustain attention for a longer period. The activities are fun, visually engaging and can often involve delightful mess! Ensure that you have gained their attention through completing Stage 1 and are ready to move onto Stage 2, use your Now and Next board to model the expectation. Lay out a large sheet of paper or material (even this can be animatedly moved up and down before placing it to the ground). Pull out your resources for the task, modelling key vocabulary. Complete your activity and ensure that it is sensory, visually stimulating and that you are enjoying yourself! Once the activity is complete ensure the children remain engaged whilst you tidy up as this is a key part of the session too.

Stage 3 – Interactive game to Turn-take and Re-engage Attention

The leader demonstrates a simple activity, often modelled with another adult in the group. Some children are then invited to have a turn but only if they want to do so. Not every child should have a turn, which teaches important emotional regulation skills, as well as the essential skills of waiting, turn-taking, and learning through modelling. Again, when your group of children are ready for this stage, the previous stages should be completed first and the Now and Next board should be used to continually model expectations. Play a game or create an activity in which it involves children coming to the front and learning to take a turn and return to their seat.

Stage 4 – Individual Activity to focus and sustain attention in a group then transition shifting attention to individual activity and then refocus on the group

Stage 4 aims to develop the skill of engaging and shifting attention. The adult leader demonstrates a simple creative task and then gives each child an individual kit to copy the task. The children take their kits to a table, complete the task independently, and then everyone returns to the group to show their completed tasks. The activity is like a TEACCH activity and can have a visual schedule to help them complete the task with independence.



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Autumn Theme Example

You can link bucket/box time with your theme/topic by linking the toys and activities to a theme. This can help model key vocabulary around the topic to the learner. Here's an example idea:

Stage 1 – Wind up hedgehog, leaves in front of a fan, light up toy in reds & oranges.

Stage 2 – Autumn Tree – squirt brown paint in the shape of a tree trunk, use autumn coloured powder paint and sift over leaf shapes. Remove the leaves and you will be left with an autumn tree. You could also drop real autumn leaves onto the picture.

Stage 3 – Autumn Leaves are Falling down – children to take turns sitting under a clear plastic umbrella whilst leaves are dropped on the umbrella and the group sings "Autumn leaves are falling down, falling down, falling down, autumn leaves are falling down on xxxx" (to the tune of London Bridge).

Stage 4 – Playdough hedgehog – children to follow visual instructions to roll playdough and add small twigs and 2 eyes to create a hedgehog.

The Role of the Adults

During stages 1 and 2 the role of the adults is as follows –

The leading adult **model's key words** and noises related to the toy, object, or activity (remember to use action words and adjectives as well as naming words). These key words can then be reinforced by the supporting adults and hopefully the children!

All adults can model and repeat the words, **pause, and wait** but **should not insist** on communication from the child.









Use **lots of non-verbal communication** to help engage – e.g. signing, pointing, gesture, body language, facial expressions and intonation to capture attention. It is important that we are interesting!!

The children can **only watch and not touch!** This is important so that the children develop their focus and attention on the leading adult.

The supporting adult's role is to **model engagement and enthusiasm**, as well as key words and language, and to ensure the children observe and do not touch the resources. If a child tries to take the item, put the item back in the bucket and replace the lid. The role of the supporting adult is to direct the child back to their seat (try to do this nonverbally).

If the child flits in and out of the activity or chooses to not engage this is okay. Try to encourage them back to the activity (non-verbally) but don't insist.

Resource Ideas

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>Bucket</p> |  | | |
| <p>Stage 2</p> | <p>Snowman Splat</p>  | <p>Autumn Leaves</p>  | <p>Rainbow</p>  |
| <p>Stage 3</p> | <p>Fishing Game</p>  | <p>Football Target</p>  | |
| <p>Stage 4</p> | <p>Make a playdough man</p>  | <p>Make a boat</p>  | |



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Really Useful Links

There are lots of resources freely available on the website to help develop your own skills and knowledge of ways to help young people increase their focus and attention.

You can find lots more information and ideas on the following links and pages:

<https://uk.pinterest.com/fidaun/attention-autism/>

<https://www.facebook.com/qinadaviesautism>

<http://asdteacher.com/attention-autism-stage-1-attention-bucket/>