



“Body Breaks” and Attention

The ability to maintain and change our level of alertness for different tasks is often an unconscious process for most adults. Individuals can use various strategies in order to keep their nervous systems alert. For example, when we are sitting for extended periods of time, perhaps attending a lecture or a meeting, we may fidget with our jewellery, shift in our chairs or chew on our pens. Likewise, children use movement in order to maintain an appropriate level of alertness. However, because their nervous systems are immature, children require greater intensity, frequency, or duration of “alerting strategies” in order to attend and engage in a specific task or situation.

“Body Breaks” are planned and scheduled activity programs with a clear beginning and end. These breaks are built into a child’s daily routine in order to help the child maintain an optimal level of alertness. In addition to helping a child become more organized and focused, “Body Breaks” allow a child to learn more about his/her body (i.e., how to move it, how to keep balance and change the position of the body in preparation for a new activity). “Body Breaks” can be used to increase or decrease a child’s level of alertness.

1. If the child’s level of alertness is too low (lethargic, slow, floppy), activities such as jumping, bouncing, swinging rapidly or spinning can bring his/her level of alertness up.
2. If the child’s level of alertness is too high (giddy, unable to focus), activities such as rocking or heavy work (i.e., pushing/pulling heavy objects) can bring his/her level of alertness down.

Most often, “Body Breaks” are used at the beginning of the day, before transitions, before beginning an activity or at the end of the day.

“Body Breaks” work best when the child is an active participant. One way to facilitate this is by having the child choose from different “Body Break” activities while the adult decides when the break should occur. As the child becomes more aware of his/her body and level of alertness, he/she will be able to decide when and which type of “Body Break” is most appropriate. Remember, “Body Breaks” are tools that provide children with “doses” to their nervous system in order to achieve or maintain optimal functioning. therefore, “Body Breaks” should not be used as rewards or reinforcers for appropriate behaviour. “Body Breaks” are a fun and simple way to help children become more engaged and learn about their bodies.



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