



TBH Focus

Mind | *Strategize*

- Even the healthiest brain can't remember everything; memory-boosting strategies and tools can rescue us from recall malfunctions.
- The most important of these are organizational tools such as datebooks and “to do” lists that keep information in order, and memorization strategies that help information to stick “in our heads.”
- Research shows that the more different memory strategies we master, the better able we are to remember what we need to on a daily basis.

The TBH Science

Paying attention—separating out and homing in on important sensory information while pushing away what's not important at the moment—is vital in daily life. We frequently need to put on mental blinders and focus on what we're doing, seeing, and hearing; otherwise we might whiz past our exit on the highway, or miss an important plot point in a movie. Faulty focus can also wreck recall: Research shows we should be able to store between five and nine bits of information in our working memory, but if we're distracted while being presented that information, such as the name of a person we've just met, it's not likely we'll be able to remember it.

Modern living is partly to blame: Too often we try to accomplish more than one thing at once (a curse of smartphones, tablets, and other high-tech wonders!), but this tactic rarely pays off. Studies show that when we multitask we're *less* productive than when we tackle to-do lists one thing at a time. Age can also affect focus. Researchers aren't entirely sure why; changes in vision and hearing may be partly to blame, as are certain lifestyle factors including sleep challenges, illness, and certain medications. Many of these issues can be dealt with by treating the problem or changing the prescription.

It's possible to maintain and even improve our ability to focus at any age with activities that force us to pay attention in order to do well, such as computer games. New research looking at mindfulness practice shows that training our brains to hold focus on one thing at a time may also have tremendous benefit for ability to pay attention.

You Will Need

- “Attention! Attention!” worksheets (see Resources)
- *I Spy* and *Where's Waldo* books
- Audiotape of a short story (see Resources)
- Timed games such as Simon, Zip It, Spot n' Learn (see Resources)



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and TBH Science to talk about the various activities and exercises that can maintain and improve focus and attention.
 - Use the “Attention, Attention!” worksheets to teach attention-boosting exercises.
 - Complete as many of the provided activities as time allows.
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 - Have group take turns looking for items in a complex visual picture. Use books such as one from the *I Spy* or *Where's Waldo?* series.
 - Lead group through a five-minute mindfulness exercise.
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From driving safely to remembering names, daily life is filled with situations that require undivided attention, but it's all too easy to let your mind wander. Build up your ability to focus on one thing at a time by doing just that—a practice called mindfulness. For a few minutes at a time, keep your attention on a single experience, such as your first bite of a meal or the sounds you hear while walking to work, by not allowing your thoughts to drift



Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.