**Attention Autism**

Attention Autism is an intervention approach designed by speech-language pathologist [Gina Davies](http://www.ginadavies.co.uk/parents-services/professional-shop/professional-online-courses/) to support the development of communication, social, and cognitive skills in children with autism (ASD).

Research shows many children struggle with skills like:

* Sustaining focus on an activity
* Shifting attention between people and objects
* Engaging socially through eye contact, turn-taking, initiation

The activities move through a structured sequence that matches how children typically learn to pay attention, imitate others, and engage socially:

1. Focus visual attention on one activity
2. Sustain attention for longer periods
3. Shift attention between people and objects
4. Shared social engagement through turn-taking routines

**The 4 stages of Attention Autism**

**Stage 1: Bucket Activity**

Goal: Teach the child to focus visual attention on adult-led activity.

The teacher fills a bucket with novel, [sensory-rich objects that will fascinate the child](https://inclusiveteach.com/2023/05/18/getting-pupils-to-maintain-attention-on-non-preferred-tasks/). Items should be colourful, make sounds, or have unique textures/properties. The bucket is kept out of sight until the activity begins so the contents remain a surprise.

The teacher sings a song while bringing the bucket into view. They remove one item at a time, draw the child’s attention to it, allow them to observe the item, and then return it to the bucket. This continues for 2-3 minutes.

Having multiple exciting items appear from the bucket keeps the child engaged. Not allowing them to handle the object maintains the mystery and novelty. This teaches the child to focus attention on an adult-led activity.

**Stage 2: Attention Builder**

Goal: Teach child to sustain visual attention for longer periods.

In this stage, the teacher presents activities that consist of multiple steps performed sequentially. Each activity should last approximately 10 minutes and involve visual, and sensory components that maintain the child’s interest.

Examples include: mixing colours with paint, assembling a puzzle, and [building a block tower](https://inclusiveteach.com/2017/03/18/inclusive-teacher-using-lego/). The teacher performs the activity while the child observes. This models the process and teaches the child to pay attention to longer, more complex tasks.

**Stage 3: Interactive Game**

Goal: Teach child to shift attention between people and objects.

Now the child gets to participate! The teacher models an interactive game, and then prompts the child to take a turn. The activities involve exaggerated actions and sensory components to keep the child engaged.

Examples include: popping bubble wrap, bouncing a ball, [and finger painting](https://inclusiveteach.com/2023/08/18/finger-painting-and-its-educational-benefits-for-children/). The teacher initially models the full activity, then performs part of the routine and pauses expectantly, allowing the child to fill in the response. This teaches back-and-forth attention shifting in a social context.

**Stage 4: Tabletop Task**

Goal: Teach child to transition between individual activity and group engagement.

In this stage, the teacher demonstrates a simple tabletop activity like stringing beads or building with blocks. The child then moves to a designated table with identical materials to complete the task independently. When finished, they transition back to rejoin the teacher and group.

This teaches the child to focus on individual work, develop motor and problem solving skills, then refocus attention back to the social environment. As skills progress, tasks can involve more steps or last longer.

**Creating an effective learning environment**

Setting up the [physical environment](https://inclusiveteach.com/2023/08/01/classroom-design-sensory-processing-autism/) appropriately is important for Attention Autism activities to run smoothly:

* Hold sessions in a quiet, distraction-free space with minimal visual and auditory distractions.
* Ensure the child and teacher are seated facing each other, relatively close together. Side-by-side and small group arrangements can be introduced later.
* Have a bin or tub ready to store materials out of sight until used in the activity.
* Designate a table or work area for independent practice during Stage 4 tabletop tasks.
* Arrange preferred toys, snacks, or books to transition to after Attention Autism sessions.
* Use a visual schedule to show the sequence of activities. Cross items off as you progress.
* For sensory activities, cover surfaces with plastic tablecloths, shower curtains, or tarps to contain messes.

Following consistent routines and providing structure through visual schedules can help children anticipating coming activities and transitions. Avoid overstimulating environments so the child can focus attention on the teacher and materials.