

FOCUS

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1. The rays of the sun are much more powerful when they are brought into focus. Just like building a muscle, focus can be built up to be stronger. Let's practice focusing.
2. As you breathe in, count slowly to 5, raising one finger for each count. As you breathe out, count down to 0, lowering each finger.
3. Notice when you get distracted during the counting. Exercise your focus by coming back to counting your breath.
Bonus: Let your hands rest in your lap and count silently in your head.

Alternative Options for Focus Objects: watching the secondhand on a clock, balancing a peacock feather on a fingertip, listening to a bell or chime until it can no longer be heard, watching a sand timer

PHYSICAL EXAM CORRELATE: During the neurologic exam for cranial nerves (eye movements), direct the child to focus on your finger. Hold it still for 10 seconds, gently reminding them to keep their focus on your finger if needed. Then as you move to each quadrant, move slowly and stay in each quadrant for 5 seconds. Encourage them to "keep your focus on my finger."

Physical Exam Alternative: Open a tongue depressor. Ask the child to balance it on their finger. Challenge them to move around the room with it balanced. If this is too easy, use the wrapper from the tongue depressor and have them do the same exercise, walking forwards and backwards.

APPLICATIONS: For the distracted or stressed out youth, focus is key. Those children who seem to be always multi-tasking or never still may benefit from cultivating a focus practice. It may also help still the mind before bedtime. Parents are encouraged to participate alongside their children.



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ONGOING DISCUSSION: Practicing focus on a daily basis helps the mind to grow. How is your focus in school? During homework? In your activities?

THE SCIENCE: A 2014 metaanalysis of mindfulness programs in schools showed promise particularly for enhancing cognitive performance and resilience to stress (Zenner et al. 2014, *Frontiers in Psychology*), while a 2011 study showed mindfulness reduced the incidence of unhealthy behaviors in adolescents at high risk (Black et al. 2011, *J of Adol Health*). A 2016 metaanalysis showed a moderate effect size of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing the symptoms of ADHD (Cairncross & Miller, 2016, *J Attn Disorders*).



*Vermont Center for
Children Youth & Families*
Vermont Family Based Approach