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# Foundations for Wellbeing

## Reception/Year R, activity plan 2: Finding focus



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# Finding focus

This is the second of five activity plans on self-regulation, mental health and wellbeing, for children aged 4-5 in Reception/year R. This activity plan focuses on everyday distractions and how to manage them. Each activity plan has been developed to support learning in the prime area of personal, social and emotional development (PSED) as part of the Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework. These plans provide early learning experiences to support children's future Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, and are precursory to the Foundations for Wellbeing lessons for key stage 1.

The activities are designed to be taught in order but should be used flexibly according to your timetable. For example, they may be taught in one session, or taught in several sessions across the week. The teacher-led activities can be used either with the whole class or in small groups, and timings will depend on the size of your group. The activities are easy to set up, with little reliance on resources, other than those to be found in most Reception classrooms. Where story books are suggested, versions are also available online.

To encourage children to use the self-regulation strategies taught in these lessons more automatically, autonomously and effectively, it is important to revisit and reinforce them regularly, as part of a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. The extension activities are designed to support this (for more information, see the Teacher Handbook). To learn more, please visit our self-guided online courses, which are available to all School Plus members.

## Learning objective and outcomes

To learn about distractions.

**Children will be able to:**

- demonstrate focus on short tasks
- notice some distractions
- use strategies to manage some distractions

## Resources required

- 1-minute sand timer
- Body outline from activity plan 1
- *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins, print or online version

## Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching these activities. They include guidance on establishing a safe learning environment and supporting children with additional vulnerabilities. They also outline useful subject knowledge on the theory and evidence informing these activities, self-regulation strategies and relevant neuroscience.

The activity plans should be used flexibly, and you are encouraged to adapt them to meet the specific needs and abilities of your children. It is also important to consider sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific children's circumstances. If safeguarding concerns arise during this lesson, these should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, in line with your school policy.

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## Baseline assessment

### Baseline assessment activity

Set a one-minute sand timer and tell children that you want to be told when it runs out – all children should sit quietly and watch the sand timer run. After 30 seconds, introduce some sounds that are designed to distract the children from their task (for example, open/close a book loudly; shuffle some papers; hum; rummage in a bag; ask questions). When the timer finishes, ask children to share their experience of the task.

Ask:

- What happened during the minute?
- Tell me something that helped you to focus on the timer
- Tell me something that distracted you from the timer *(Explain that being 'distracted' means not paying attention to what you're doing or supposed to be doing. So, if something 'distracts you', it means that something is taking your attention away from what you're supposed to be doing).*
- What could you do to help you to refocus on, or pay attention to, the timer?
  *(You may need to explain that 'paying attention' to something is when we focus on it, for example, listening carefully when someone is speaking)*

Listen to the responses, taking note of any insights into children's existing knowledge, understanding, and vocabulary around the concept of distraction.

### Introduction

Explain that everyone gets distracted and that distractions can sometimes be helpful, for example, daydreaming to pass the time on a long car journey, or focussing on playing with a toy when feeling upset. But distractions can be unhelpful when they make it difficult to pay attention to something, like with the sand timer. Distractions can also be unhelpful when we want to pay attention to something that we care about or enjoy, like listening to/reading a book, making something, or playing with friends.

## Core activities

### Activity 1: Everyday distractions

Show the body outline from activity plan 1 and begin by reminding children where the brain is. Help children identify the brain as where distractions that come from inside us start. Explain that these distractions are caused by many different things, such as by hunger, thirst, worry, wanting someone's attention, needing the toilet or needing to move around. People can also be distracted by something they are excited about, such as a visit to a friend's house after school or a family celebration. Then, highlighting relevant parts of the body, explain that we can also be distracted by things outside of us; things we hear, see, touch, smell and taste.

Take a walk around the school and play a game of 'I Spy Distractions,' encouraging children to notice external distractions (that are outside of us). They can use their senses to identify these

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distractions, for example, smell – food; hear - voices, loud noises; see - people moving around, bright colours.

Back in the classroom, encourage children to identify distractions that are internal (coming from inside us), for example, feeling hungry, needing to go to the toilet, or feeling curious about something.

Share the following scenario and ask children to put their hands up each time they identify something that is distracting Ben (distractions in bold):

> *Ben is busy making a model when he **hears the teacher tell the class that it's 10 minutes until playtime**. Ben really wants to finish his model before play. He starts to **think about who he will play with at playtime and what snack he will choose and** stops focussing on his model. Now he **needs to go to the toilet**. He puts up this hand and asks to go to the toilet. When he comes back, he focusses on getting his model finished. The bell for playtime goes, just as Ben puts the last pieces on his model. Phew – he finished in time!*

Ask children to identify which of the distractions were unhelpful: *thinking about who he will play with and what snack to choose* and those that are helpful*: needing to go to the toilet, the teacher's time warning.*

**Challenge:** Ask, why are things we see, hear and smell distracting? What sort of a classroom environment helps us to focus?

### Activity 2: Looking inside the story

Read, or show the online version of, *Rosie's Walk* once through, to familiarise children with the story.

Ask:

- What is Rosie doing? *Going for a walk.*
- What is Fox doing? *Trying to catch Rosie.*
- What happens in the end? *Rosie has her dinner and Fox runs away.*

Read again, stopping to ask children to identify any 'outside things' (things that are happening around Rosie) that might distract her. *Children might suggest: Rosie might want to look at the fish in the pond, she might want to stop for a chat with the other animals, she might want to look at the windmill, or she might be distracted by Fox following her.*

Highlight that Rosie does not become distracted by any of these things and ask them to discuss and share reasons why they think this might be. *Children might suggest she was focused on her walk and getting home for dinner, she ignored Fox.*

Remind children that sometimes distractions can be 'outside,' and other times distractions can be 'inside' us, coming from our own brain and our own feelings. Tell them that during her walk, Rosie felt very hungry – a distraction 'inside' her. But she knew that Fox was behind her so, rather than getting distracted, she used her brain to choose what she wanted to focus on – and that was getting home for dinner.

- Next, ask children: What might have happened if Rosie became distracted by the fox? *Fox might have caught up with her.*
- What was it that eventually distracted Fox from Rosie? *A swarm of bees.*

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- How did Rosie achieve her goal of getting home for dinner? *She didn't become distracted and kept her focus on getting home.*
- What else could Rosie have been distracted by? *The rake, frogs, mice or the goat.*

Explain that Rosie achieved her goal of getting home for dinner by not becoming distracted by unhelpful distractions.

### Activity 3: Rosie's red things

Tell children that, after dinner, Rosie told Grandpa Rooster about her day and explained how she managed to not be distracted. She said, "*I looked for three things of my favourite colour, red. This helped me to stop thinking about unhelpful distractions so I could re-focus on my goal of getting home for dinner*. Give children one minute to practise this strategy – they should look around and try to spot three things in their favourite colour. Then, ask children what else they think Rosie might do to help manage distractions, and take feedback.

Next, explain that Rosie tells Grandpa Rooster about what she does to make herself feel better when she is not feeling so good. For example, Rosie explains that when she is worried or scared, sometimes she distracts herself from these feelings by thinking about something happy, like having a snuggle. Or she takes five slow breaths – breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth. These help her to feel better and are helpful distractions.

Ask children to think about something calm or happy and explain that if they get distracted by unpleasant feelings like worry or fear, they can think of happy things to begin to make themselves feel better.

Finally, explain that Rosie tells Grandpa Rooster that reminding herself of what she's doing and why it matters, is a good way of keeping focused on her goal. Ask children:

- What was Rosie's goal in the story? *To have a nice walk and get home in time for dinner.*
- Why did this matter? Encourage children to make their own conclusions to this such as: *she wanted to have dinner with her family, she didn't want to be late for dinner.*
- What does reminding herself of this help her to do? *Helps her to keep focused on her goal instead of focusing on the distractions.*

**Support:** Give children visual clues, such as:

- five counting beads – each bead represents one breath in through the nose and out through the mouth – this is useful for keeping calm and getting focused
- images of 'happy' things, such as smiling faces, or baby animals – looking at and thinking about happy things can make someone feel better when they are distracted by things that are making them worried or upset
- three things of the same colour – thinking about and looking for three things of the same colour can help to take someone's mind off distractions and help them to focus again.

Practise using these strategies for overcoming distractions.

**Challenge:** Ask children to make their own suggestions about how to manage distractions.

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## Reflection and endpoint assessment

Repeat the baseline activity and ask children to give examples of any helpful distractions and any unhelpful distractions they noticed. Ask them how they managed or ignored any unhelpful distractions?

Then ask children to think about what strategy they will use next time they become distracted, for example when:

- drawing a picture for a friend
- reading a book with a grown-up
- playing with a toy

Children do not need to share their personal reflection.

## Signposting support

Explain that everyone gets distracted sometimes, and that distractions aren't always unhelpful. But sometimes, they stop us from achieving what we want to do or can make us feel annoyed or upset. Distractions can also make it difficult for us to pay attention to pleasant or enjoyable experiences. Tell children that if they need support with managing distractions, they can practise some of the strategies we have learnt today, talk to you or another adult in school, or to someone at home who they like talking to and who listens to them.

## Activities to extend and embed the learning

The following play opportunities and activities may help children to focus, shift attention and ignore distractions better:

- *Kit's game*: place a number of items on a tray for children to observe, cover and remove one item at a time. Challenge children to identify the missing object.
- *Matching games:* such as Snap! Happy Families, Dobble and Bingo.
- *Singing and rhymes*: Concentration, Who ate the cookie in the cookie jar? etc.
- *Controlled movement activities*: Thai Chi, yoga or following a dance routine

During these activities, encourage children to notice what supports them to focus on the task. Ask:

- What helps you to focus?
- What happens when you focus on a task?
- How does it feel?
- What might happen if you lose focus?

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