

Attention tunnels

The aim of this activity is to:

- Understand how it feels to be absorbed in a task or activity
- Highlight that it can be difficult to switch from one task to another or to focus on several at the same time

Resources needed:

- Art sheet (see next page)
- Variety of everyday items – for example, an apple, a pen, a glove, a cup, a jumper

Explain the following:

Do you ever get so interested in a book, a game or an activity that you lose track of time and hardly notice what's going on around you? Does it feel good?

What happens, though, when someone wants you to listen to them, or to stop what you're doing immediately and do something else? How does that make you feel?

Together we are going to explore "attention tunnels" and how difficult it can be to drag yourself out of them.

Method

Activity 1: Look at the art sheet on the next page. The road in the middle is something that you really enjoy and focus on. Write or draw on it what that thing is.

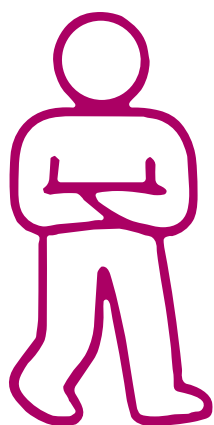
On the roads that shoot off from there, write or draw people or things that get in the way of thing you love doing (bed time? The end of your screen time?)

Get children to share what they have created with their classmates, and discuss the differences in everyone's pictures.

Activity 2: Set up a group of everyday objects and tell pupils they have several minutes to memorise everything that's there (don't specify exactly how long).

After 10-20 seconds or so, ask them an unrelated question. After another 10-20 seconds, ask them to do something else quickly (like stand up and turn around). After another 10-20 seconds, ask them to remember an additional piece of information, such as a name or a number. After another 10-20 seconds, play a burst of music. Stop the activity without warning.

At the end, see how many items pupils could remember. Discuss how it felt when they were distracted or when additional demands were placed on them. What would have made it easier for them? (timed countdowns? Allowing them to focus on just the one task? Silence?)



For autistic learners: Attention tunnels are not something to fix. They are the doorway through which learning enters. When education respects that doorway, autistic people often learn faster, deeper, and with more joy than typical systems ever allow. - Lucy Sinclair, Teacher