



This message is meant to be cut out, photocopied, and sent home with children as a resource for parents! It's also available online (in English and Spanish) at naeyc.org/tyc.

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Focus and Self-Control

Self-control and focus are both important skills for children to practice in order to succeed in school. Children play many fun games and activities in the classroom to help them learn these key life skills. Here are some that you and your child can do together at home.

Swap in different words to favorite songs. Have fun singing songs with a twist. For example, sing “The wheels on the train go round and round” instead of “The wheels on the bus go round and round.” Does your child notice when you use different words? This game can help children develop listening skills.

Play games like Simon Says, I Spy, and “I’m thinking of something that starts with the letter . . .” These games help children practice focusing, paying attention, and remembering rules—all while having fun.

Play an opposite game. To help your child think flexibly, try playing a game where you do the opposite of what you say; for example, say “Simon says, touch your feet” while you touch your head. Or say you will dance quickly to slow music, then put on fast music and dance slowly.

Play sorting games while cleaning up. Suggest picking up toys of a particular type, color, or shape. “Let’s pick up the blue crayons first, then the red crayons.” Even cleanup time can be fun and help children focus and think flexibly.

Try singing a song while waiting in line or at a restaurant. Children who have tools to help them manage their behavior while waiting—like singing a favorite song—are ultimately more successful in pursuing goals with less frustration and distraction.

Choose books, games, and activities that reflect things your child finds interesting—whether it’s trucks, flowers, or bugs! Children focus best when they care about a topic. What does your child talk about? What themes come up as she plays?

These activities are adapted from Ellen Galinsky’s article “Skill 1: Focus and Self Control,” the second in her series *The 7 Essential Life Skills*, in *TYC*, volume 9, number 3, page 10.

A message from your child’s teacher:

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