
Attention Games

101 Fun, Easy Games That
Help Kids Learn to Focus

BARBARA SHER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
RALPH BUTLER

 **JOSSEY-BASS**
A Wiley Imprint
www.josseybass.com

Attention Games

Attention Games

101 Fun, Easy Games That
Help Kids Learn to Focus

BARBARA SHER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
RALPH BUTLER

 **JOSSEY-BASS**
A Wiley Imprint
www.josseybass.com

Copyright © 2006 by Barbara Sher. All rights reserved.
Illustrations copyright © 2006 by Ralph Butler. All rights reserved.

Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Imprint
989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 www.josseybass.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly call our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-956-7739, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3986, or fax 317-572-4002.

Jossey-Bass also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sher, Barbara.

Attention games : 101 fun, easy games that help kids learn to focus / Barbara Sher ; illustration by Ralph Butler.— 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-471-73654-7 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-471-73654-6 (alk. paper)

1. Educational games. 2. Attention in children. I. Title: 101 fun, easy games that help kids learn to focus. II. Title: One hundred and one fun, easy games that help kids learn to focus. III. Title.

LB1029.G3S538 2006

371.33'7—dc22

2006008090

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

PB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to all the unique children I have had the joy
and honor of working and playing with.

Acknowledgments - - - - -

To make a book, an author needs a publisher, editors, an artist, and a production crew. For this I have my very able editor, Kate Bradford; her competent assistant, Connie Santisteban; a creative illustrator, Ralph Butler; and a production crew headed up by the very capable Justin Frahm. I'm grateful for them all.

To come up with ideas for the text, an author needs inspirational coworkers and friends who are equally interested in the world of children. For this I have the "Dream Team" at the Special Education/Early Childhood Program in the Northern Mariana Islands of Saipan—namely, Dora Palacios-Won, Mark and Patty Staal, Jerry Diaz, Fidelia Ruben, Tracy Nance, Mercy Tisa, Ataur Rahman, Judy Hawkins, Yollanda Lelly, and Rita Olopai. I appreciate and adore them all.

To take pleasure in the writing process, an author needs loving support from friends and family. For this I have many wonderful people: Marissa and Mark SherKenney; Roxanne Sher-Skelton, Ehren Olson; Anna Sher; Fran Simon; Trisha and David Ferlic; Shirley Sher; Don Cohen; Monty Sher; Glo Harris; Bonnie, Jenna, Marc, Jacob, and Leslie Wilson; Maxwell, Griffin, Jessica, and Stewart Evans; Jenny Slack; Nolan and Manny Mariano; Rita Bonnici; Susan Book; Jill Derickson; Ericka Frink; and all my precious Humboldt County buddies. I love them all back.

But to make my book have heart, this author needed children to field test the games. My deep appreciation goes to all the children I play with every day in my work, especially the ones who show me that there really is something special about being "special." Thank you for teaching me that humans come in many flavors. And they are all good.

Contents



Introduction	1
--------------	---

How to Contact the Author	5
---------------------------	---



PART ONE

Games for Infants	7
-------------------	---

Follow My Face	9
----------------	---

Stick Out Your Tongue	11
-----------------------	----

The Glory of Hands	13
--------------------	----

Sock on a Bottle	14
------------------	----

Perfect Rattles	15
-----------------	----

First Exercises	17
-----------------	----

Visually Amused	21
-----------------	----

A Light Touch	22
---------------	----

Can You Hear What I Hear?	24
---------------------------	----

A Very Merry Unbirthday	26
-------------------------	----

Pokey Pudding Hole	27
--------------------	----

Dangling Toys	28
---------------	----

Bat the Ball	31
--------------	----

High Chair Fling	32
------------------	----

Ice Cube on a Tray	34
--------------------	----

If It Doesn't Hurt—It's a Toy	35
-------------------------------	----

A Spotlight in the Dark	37
-------------------------	----

What's out There?	39
-------------------	----

Where'd It Go?	41
----------------	----

— — — —
PART TWO

Games for 1- to 3-Year-Olds 45

Bracelet of Leaves	47
The Enchantment of Water	48
Follow the Floating Feather	49
The Knocking Game	50
Ping-Pong Balls and Coffee Cans	51
Surprise Me	53
The Feely Game	54
What Is That Sound?	55
From Beginning to End	57
Being a Radio	59
Catch a Falling Scarf	60
Instant Picture	61
You've Got Mail	62
Kaleidoscope	63
Magnet Hunt	64
Put a Lid on It	66
Ooh—Smell This!	67
What's in the Sock?	69

— — — —
PART THREE

Games for 3- to 6-Year-Olds 71


My Story Is the Best Story	73
Another Viewpoint	74
Art de Deux	76
Batting Practice	77
The Happening Book	78
Lessons from the Rocks	80
Mismatched Tea Party	81
Plenty Peanut Hunt	84
Regroup Time	85

Shadow Games	87
Deck of Cards	88
Hand on Top	89
How Many?	90
Indoor Picture Hunt	91
Mexican Yo-Yo	92
Mini-Montessori	94
Going on a Monster Hunt	97
Paint the World	99
The Perfect Gifts	100
Sounds Right	104
Word Matching	105

— — — —
PART FOUR

Games for 6- to 12-Year-Olds 109

All the Things You Can Think Of	111
Back Writing	112
Belly Counts	113
Expanding Interest	114
Focused Fidgeting	116
Guess How Old	117
How Do You Look?	119
Junk Box Art	120
Name the Sounds	121
Navigator	122
Police Report	123
Ring of String	125
Shelf Paper Story	126
Thinking Box	127
I'm the Teacher	129
My Mind Is a TV Screen	130
Paper Plethora	132

	Potato Puppets	133
	Sensory Matching	135
	Tile Painting	137
	Backwards Time Management	138
	Toe Stepping	140
	Toothpick Art	141
	PART FIVE	
	Games for Teens	143
	Accentuate the Positive	145
	Achy Breaky Heart	146
	Annoyed with the Flower Bud	147
	Five Good Moments	149
	Getting the Priorities	150
	My Special Things	152
	I'm Like That Sometimes	153
	Imagine That!	155
	Send Joy to Bulgaria	156
	Life Is a Movie, and You Are the Star!	158
	List Your Options	160
	Name the Consequences	162
	Postcard Diaries	164
	Scriptwriter	165
	Self-Portraits	166
	Ten Breaths	167
	The Home Videographer	169
	Waiter, Take My Order	170
	Flip-Flop Stamps	172
	Word Puzzles	173
	Index	175

Attention Games

Introduction



If you want to focus children's attention, you first have to capture their interest. In this book, I'll show you how to get children's attention with fun and interesting games and how to help them expand their powers of attention in ways that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Everyone is paying attention to something. What that something is and how long the attention is captured are the variables.

There are two forms of attention. One is open and global; you light on many different aspects of your surroundings for short periods of time. Open attention gives you an overall impression of your environment. Think of being at a party. You become aware of the general feel of the party by noticing people's body language as well as different sounds, smells, and sights. Your attention focuses on many things fleetingly to give you a holistic sense of what is happening. Or think of riding a bike. When you ride a bike, you can attend to steering, pedaling, and the traffic around you while also enjoying the feeling of the breeze blowing through your hair.

The second form of attention is more focused; you concentrate on one thing for long periods. Focused attention requires active filtering of excess information, and you notice details in sequences rather than all at once. Whereas global attention is like an overhead light, focused attention is like a flashlight with a narrow beam. This is the kind of attention required to do things like follow instructions, write an article, or do a crossword puzzle.

Everyone needs both of these types of attention. Open attention gives us a lot of information quickly and encourages creativity by causing us to notice connections and make new patterns. This creative trail helps us find new ways of seeing old things. At the same time, though, nothing can be accomplished without the absorbed, one-step-at-a-time perseverance of focused attention.

We do best when we are able to shift easily between an open state of awareness and a focused one.

Typical behavior for a child diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is to notice everything and filter nothing. Whereas another child may focus on the teacher, the child with ADD may instead notice the buzzing fly in the room, the birds fluttering in the trees outside the window, the whispering in the back of the room, the holes in the ceiling tile, and how the air from the vent is making a child's hair ribbons ripple. As one mother pointed out, "One thing about my kid—she sure is observant. She notices things no one else would notice, and she sees relationships between stuff out there that no one else would ever think of."

There is often a similar pattern in not being able to filter out the surrounding sounds or to resist going on a finger safari to reach out and touch all there is to touch.

And yet as Thomas Armstrong points out in his book *Myth of the ADD Child*, there is substantial evidence to suggest that children labeled ADD do not show distractibility in specific situations. One mother of a child diagnosed with ADD said, "My child is capable of long periods of concentration when he is watching his favorite sci-fi video or examining the inner workings of a pin-tumbler lock." It is also known that a child with attention difficulties can frequently focus well in a one-to-one situation with a caring adult and an activity that is of interest to the child.

As Dr. Mel Levine points out in his book *A Mind at a Time*, there's more that's right than wrong with these kids. Levine has seen children who suffer with weak attention control when young turn into remarkable adults. He comments, "I believe these children are challenging types of human variation rather than deviation. . . . What a crime to assume simply that all of these kids are damaged goods. After many years working with these individuals, I am impressed with how many of them turn out to be extraordinary adults. We just have to get them there."

Most of us use our own unique combination of open and focused attention. All of us would benefit from learning how to be better at one type or the other. This book is geared toward the "wellness model," which assumes

that no person is broken and that everyone can gain from appropriate experiences. Being able to shift fluidly between open attention and focused concentration is a useful skill that everyone can learn and improve on.

Ideally we teach our children the skills of open and focused attention as infants, when they undergo the most rapid brain development. During this period, the child's brain is becoming "hard-wired," and she is particularly receptive to experiences. There are many games here to help the infant and toddler develop good attention skills from the start.

There are many games for preschool children that will encourage them to notice details in life. The more we notice the different aspects of a situation, the longer we will attend. Think about experiences you have had. For example, if someone points out to you a variety of wildflower, you are much more likely to pay attention to those flowers and even look for them the next time you go for a walk in the woods. Knowing about details in life increases your attention span.

There are many games in this book for school-age children that are novel to their routine experiences. Novelty raises a person's arousal level and therefore increases attentiveness. In order to learn, we all have to have a certain level of arousal. Too low, and we feel too sleepy to pay attention; too high, and we are too fidgety. It is thought that hyperactive children are actually trying to raise their arousal level because they have low interest in routines. Novelty sharpens their interest and helps them focus; their need for novelty explains why they do best in a school that emphasizes action-oriented, hands-on, project-based participation.

Playing these games can also raise children's self-esteem by showing children who have been labeled as lacking attention skills that they too have focusing abilities within them. And overabsorbed children whose attention is narrowly focused can learn the delights of opening their awareness to all that is.

As adolescents continue to develop their attentive skills, there is the added factor of increased anxiety because of the social desire to fit in. Games for these teenagers are geared toward reducing anxiety levels so they can be comfortable and better able to focus on the present moment.

The games and activities in this book are organized into those that encourage open attention, those that encourage focused attention skills, and those that encourage fluidity in shifting from one type of attention to the other.

The more we do anything, the better we get. And because enjoyable ways always make learning easier, all the games have one single important element in common—fun!

After interviewing a large number of teachers, Sandra Rief noted in her book *How to Reach and Teach ADD/ADHD Children*, “If these kids are happy and feel good about themselves, they will learn!”

Playing these games includes something else that is precious to children: *your* attention. Remember how it felt when you were a child and a loving adult took the time to play with you? It makes you feel that you matter. As an occupational therapist who has worked with all kinds of children for over thirty-five years, I see how children light up when they are given individual attention, and I know how good it feels to be the cause of that joy.

The games in this book benefit you both.