



# POWERFUL WORDS

## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

### DEAR DR. ROBYN

**Young students:** "I keep my eyes, ears and brain on the job until it's done!"

**Older students/teens/adults:** "Using laser-like concentration to complete each task despite distractions."

*Dear Dr. Robyn,*

*Plain and simple, our child has some trouble paying attention. Listening, paying attention, and zoning out are all problems. Teachers have talked about the issue of being "spacey" and looking out the window or out into the hallway in school. I was wondering if you had some strategies for how to help increase focus. What can we do to make this better? Can we?*

*P. Rolland, Tampa, FL*

Dear P,

You are not alone. Many children have trouble paying attention--some more than others. While nearly all children and teens struggle with feeling distracted at times, about 20% have at least moderate difficulties with inattention and distractibility and 4-5% have severe difficulties.

It's important to note that sometimes, just being part of this fast-paced media-saturated world can be a challenge. There is so much to look at and hear! Many people believe that when kids aren't paying attention, they are doing this on purpose- but this is typically not the case. Focus issues are real and valid.

(1) Tune into basics: If your child is hungry, tired, thirsty, worried or sick-- these are all things that can make focus a struggle. Ensure that your child isn't, for example, leaving for school without eating

breakfast and gets a good night's sleep. Taking care of these basic things can often work wonders.

(2) Talk to your children about focus and discuss how they can "catch and correct" themselves. This isn't about shame- it's just about noticing. If your children catch themselves zoning out or focusing on something other than what they are supposed to focus on in that moment (for example, their teacher explaining a math concept), have them acknowledge it in their head, and then refocus. They might change the way they are sitting, move their body, pick up a pen to write down what is being said, or do whatever works for them to help pay attention.

(3) Take note: When is your child having trouble with focus? Is it constant or is it during a particular time of day? Is it after lunch in school? Before doing homework? Before school? Is it

on specific days of the week? Once you and your child figure out the patterns, you may be able to figure out next steps.

Finally, ask for help. Your child's teacher or coach may be able to offer some insight into what they are seeing and your child's pediatrician may be able to offer some strategies that could address the issue. You don't have to figure it out on your own!

Here's to your success!

