

4 S's of Attention

As we've been discussing, it's important to help children understand what we mean by attention, by referencing the five P's. There's another dimension in talking about attention where I use the letter 'S', I use words that begin with the letter 'S.'

One of the things I talk about with children is the importance of selecting what they're going to pay attention to. This is largely the executive function network. Identifying goals, using motivations to establish a mission or sense of purpose. One 'S' is selecting.

The second S is saying no to distractions. The key strategies for dealing with distractions is not just to ignore them, but to actually say no and remind yourself of your mission. Not now, I'm working on my math. Let's talk later, I've got a book to finish. When you talk about saying no to distractions, you're giving kids a basic strategy or concept they can use.

I also talk about screening distractions. That is, putting them out of sight or out of mind. I also talk about how we can screen distractions by exposing ourselves to them over and over and over again. Remember that the brain is hardwired to not pay attention to things that it's very familiar. Otherwise, if you were living in New York City, you'd be distracted by every street noise you heard.

Another 'S' that I talk about is the idea of learning to shift your attention. It's a very, very important skill. Hopefully most of the shifts of attention comes from the executive function network. You're shifting with purpose. But remember, salience network is important too, so there are times when the brain, when we have to shift attention automatically. We have to be able to stop what we're doing and recognize that the toast is burning, or someone is ringing the bell or that someone in the class needs something from you. Your ability to shift attention both with purpose or naturally through the salience network is a very important skill. That's another way to help children understand about the nature of attention. We talk about selecting, we talk about screening, we talk about saying no to distraction, and we talk about shifting attention.