

sa

# Homeschooling

ISSUE 9, 2022

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# Ask Dalena

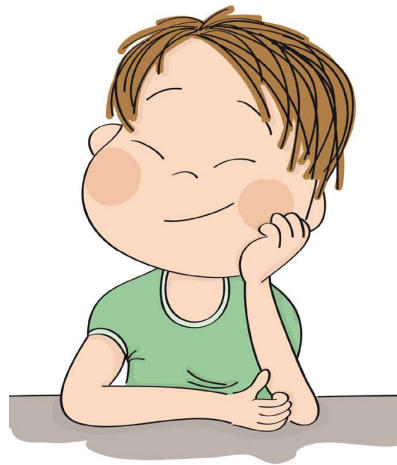


Dalena van der Westhuizen will answer any questions or concerns you may have about learning, concentration, memory and cognitive development – and, of course, the frustrations arising from these

**M**y 15-year-old son becomes distracted extremely easily. How can I improve his focus? – *Nicola, Cape Town*

Kids who are easily distracted are usually impacted by auditory stimuli (noises, sounds) or visual stimuli (things they see) or, in some instances, both. Here are some practical tips to try:

- The teenage years and lack of sleep usually go hand in hand. I recently read an article about new research into the effect of constant sleep deprivation on the teenage brain. Lack of sleep obviously affects any person's ability to pay attention and stay focused. An interesting conclusion from this study was that teenagers actually need more sleep than younger children, so make sure your son's getting enough sleep every night.
- Make sure his workspace is set up for minimal distractions.



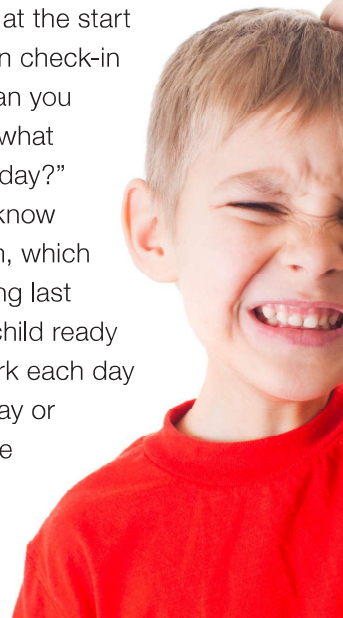
- Break down any academic work/tasks/homework into smaller chunks. It's easier to stay focused for shorter periods, so the goal here is to work intensively and remain focused for brief periods between breaks.
- Be sure to read "Top Study Tips for 2022" in issue 7 of *SAH*, which is packed with great research-based guidelines that will go a long way towards helping your son.

**Before we even start doing schoolwork, I'm exhausted just from getting my two kids motivated and excited to start.**

**Do you have any tips for self-motivation? – Chelsey, Pretoria**

To continue learning and improving, kids need intrinsic motivation. Implementing a few self-motivating strategies should make a real difference.

Explain to the kids what self-motivation is (keep it age-related) and ask each of them to come up with one strategy/plan to get them going in the morning that would make starting schoolwork easier and more fun. It has to be something practical and they must be able to stick to it for an agreed time-frame. For example: the kids could do 30 minutes of any activities they like at the start of the day, or a fun check-in such as: "What can you remember about what we studied yesterday?" or "What do you know about germination, which we were discussing last week?" The first child ready to start schoolwork each day could get extra play or device time. These





are simply suggestions which you can modify to suit your particular children and routine.

**My 12-year-old son works hard and does well, but gets frustrated really easily and often gives up completely when he can't solve a problem immediately. How can I encourage him to persevere? - Kim, Johannesburg**

When it comes to problem-solving, some kids need more time to work through the information. They may also have difficulty finding a logical starting point in the problem-solving process.

Of course, your son's confidence in his ability to problem-solve also plays a role.

Tackling a specific task or problem often seems like an

impossible mountain to climb. Break it down into smaller units/tasks and let your son verbalise the problem to be solved, as well as the steps needed to be taken – he can write these down, doodle or draw them, or say them aloud. Encourage him to identify different approaches to solving the problem. Then praise his effort, no matter what the outcome might be.

**My child's marks are good, but not great, especially considering how much time he spends studying. How can I tell whether his studying strategy or technique isn't really working and whether there's a different method that might work better for him? – Marlene, Louis Trichardt**

It might be worth your while investigating different study strategies and techniques until your son finds one, or a combination of

**About Dalena**



Dalena van der Westhuizen is the co-founder and MD of BrainAbility, a cognitive development specialist, a master brain coach and an internationally certified cognitive coach. She translates the latest international cognitive research and best practice into strategies that can be applied by parents and educators alike.

A mom and a self-confessed chocoholic, Dalena enjoys working with both kids and adults to improve the way their brains process information for better learning, reading and focusing.

**Send your questions for Dalena to: [adri@isikhova.co.za](mailto:adri@isikhova.co.za).**

techniques, that works well for him. Try incorporating some of the study tips in the article "Top Study Tips for 2022" in issue 7 of SAH magazine. However, if he then still spends a lot of time studying and his results don't improve, it might be time to consider having him assessed and then strengthening the underlying cognitive skills he relies on for easy and efficient learning.