

# Stages of Attention Development

Attention develops from birth with a child's ability to sustain attention improving with age. As attention develops, children spend less time looking at simple things and relatively longer looking at more complex items and activities. The ability to sustain attention is a combination of cognitive ability, ability to control impulsiveness and ability to inhibit distractibility towards other interests. The table below is based on that by Cooper, Moodley and Reynell (1978) describing the levels in attention development. Usually by the time a child starts school, they will be able to sustain their attention to learn, plan a sequence of actions, inhibit impulses to respond to other attractions and stay on task. Should any difficulties in attention be observed, a referral for further assessment and observation should be made.

	Description
Stage 1 (0 - 1 Year)	At this stage, there is a high level of distractibility. The child's attention flits from object, person or event to another. Any new event will immediately distract the child.
Stage 2 (1- 2 Year)	Children will demonstrate rigid attention on a task of their own choosing. Resistant to interference e.g., any intervention from an adult (visual or verbal). At this stage the child must ignore additional stimuli in order to concentrate on their chosen task.
Stage 3 (2 - 3 Year)	Single channelled attention is demonstrated at this stage. Attention must be fully obtained before switching to a different task. At this stage, a child cannot attend to auditory and visual stimuli from different sources. While the child is playing, the child cannot listen to an adult's directions. Shifting whole attention to the speaker and back to the toy can be achieved with adult help.
Stage 4 (3 - 4 Years)	Early integrated attention is demonstrated at this stage. Children can control their focus of attention - able to alternate full attention (visual and auditory), between the speaker and the task. The child will need to look at the speaker to listen.
Stage 5 (4 - 5 Years)	Mature integrated attention / Two channelled attention is demonstrated at this stage. The child is able to continue with an activity while listening to the speaker giving directions. The concentration span is short, but the child will be able to be taught in a group.
Stage 6 (5 - 6 Years)	Attention is established, flexible and sustained.

Sources used: Sheridan, MD, (2007), From birth to five years: Children's developmental progress.