



Cultivating the Habit of Attention

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this habit of attention. It is ... "within the reach of everyone and should be made the primary object of all mental discipline;" for whatever the natural gifts of the child, it is only so far as the habit of attention is cultivated in him that he is able to make use of them.

Charlotte Mason, *Home Education*, 146

The Habit of Attention is Important—One of Ambleside School's commitments to parents is this: "All students will be supported in mastering the habit of focused attention" through inspirational ideas and natural consequences.

Why is this habit of attention so important?

In addition to the standard classroom practice of presenting short, varied lessons and narration after a single reading, we work with each student in other ways to develop this habit of attention. These are simple interventions implemented daily in the classroom that are also useful at home. Some of these include:

Kindly requiring that a child keep eye contact when engaged in conversation or discussion with someone.

Asking the child to repeat instructions back to ensure they have understood them.

Using subtle gestures such as gently tapping or placing an encouraging hand on a child's shoulder to re-focus their attention back to the work at hand.

Sometimes, the calm and simple movement of a teacher to closer proximity beside a child lends the student the strength and reassurance they may need to help them regain attention.

Some students may need a teacher or parent to help them by breaking down their work into steps and estimating for them the time a task will take. Charlotte Mason's idea of "set work for set time" is a way to remedy a child's tendency to let the mind wander and become distracted. It is important to have a finite amount of time planned for specific work to be done; a realistic expectation is established, the expectation is clearly communicated, and the expectation and timeframe are enforced. For instance, the teacher gives thirty minutes to complete an illustration in a copybook. If a student completes her best work before the thirty minutes has passed, she is then rewarded with that extra time for leisure before she begins her next task. A child will quickly get this idea and be motivated to use his time wisely.

Older students may need an inspirational appeal to their will:

He should be taught to feel a certain triumph in compelling himself to fix his thoughts. Let him know what the real difficulty is, how it is the nature of his mind to be incessantly thinking.

Charlotte Mason, *Home Education*, 145



When he brings his own will to make himself attend, "Well done! You have done your duty," could be our encouraging response. Attention is both a trait and a skill and developing its power in our children requires steady practice and confidence that, no matter how weak the trait, each step of growth unleashes new strength.

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