

Spaced out/inattentive/disengaged

Concern

Distracted, inattentive behavior, characterized by lack of concentration, trouble following through on instructions, losing things easily, forgetting key details, and being easily distracted.

Description

These students seem spaced out almost all the time. They may sit in the back and doodle or stare out the window. They get lost in daydreams or forget what they set out to do at the outset. They get pulled into sights and sounds around them. They are forever losing things. A distractible child may imagine playing a whole game of basketball during a single class period.

There are many reasons for gross inattention. Students may be bored, have ADHD, be high on drugs, have some personal problem, have difficulty communicating because they have ASD or are an English Language Learner, have a Specific Learning Disability that impacts their executive function, or may be tired and/or hungry.

Sometimes this behavior is a sign of highly creative students. Albert Einstein was a serious space cadet. Robert Frost got kicked out of school for daydreaming. Bored students may retreat into their minds because the experience there is so much richer than what's available in the immediate environment.

Sometimes students lose track of their immediate surrounding because they are preoccupied with something upsetting, or even traumatic. They may be replaying difficult situations, like parental arguments or physical or sexual abuse, in the literal effort to resolve it. For this reason, giving them a chance to address the underlying reason is an important part of the solution.

Distractibility may, or may not, be part of a disability. Specific Learning Disabilities, like Dyslexia, affect memory, attention and student's ability to plan, organize, and manage time. Some learning disabilities, related to executive function impact the brain in ways that make students appear apathetic - but just because they aren't engaging or focusing, doesn't mean they don't care. Students with ASD might appear disengaged because they are reacting to a situation, do not have the social skills to interact or may be feeling socially isolated.

English language learners (ELLs) in the classroom can appear apathetic, but may actually be confused or behind as they struggle to learn academic content and the English language at the same time. They might be too shy or embarrassed - or not know how - to say they don't understand.

If an adolescent who's been doing fine, suddenly spaces out, look for other causes.

Goals of intervention - students will:

- Begin to understand what causes their attention problem
- Understand how they learn and ways to learn better
- Learn attentive behavior
- Develop skills for maintaining focus
- Ask for adult guidance, if they have an underlying problem

A suggested scope and sequence - Teens

Learning style	Trauma	Paying attention
Strengths	Drugs	Controlling impulses
Intelligences	ELL	Self-worth
Brain	ASD	Active listening
Curiosity	Stress	Goals
Creativity	Dyslexia	Following instructions
Bored	Organized	Asking for help
Distracted	Study habits	Problem solving
Mindfulness	Physical Sensations	

A suggested scope and sequence - Kids

Learning style	Directions following	Listening
Strengths	Paying attention	Drugs
Smarts	Controlling impulses	Goals
Brain	Self-awareness	Help - getting it
Distracted	Self-talk	Problem solving
Organized	Hard things	ASD
Study habits	Success at learning	ELL