

Issue: Off-Task Behaviors

Strategies to Consider:

Before we consider strategies for dealing with off-task behavior, we need to define what might constitute and what might cause an off-task behavior. Off-task behaviors are behaviors that can span a large spectrum. Perhaps you have a student who is easily distracted, one who talks to his neighbor or one who constantly leaves his seat. All of these behaviors can be considered “off-task” and take away from learning time.

There are many different reasons why students might display off-task behaviors. While students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may be more likely than their peers to display off-task behaviors, other children may also display them as well. If students do not understand classwork or find it difficult, they may become disengaged and more likely to display off-task behavior. There may be other students whose behaviors are distracting or other factors in the environment that cause a student to display off-task behaviors. Whatever the reasoning, it is important to refocus students to [increase engaged time](#) and decrease off-task time.

Consider the time(s) when students are off-task. If it is during instruction, try to keep children on-task and engaged by varying your teaching style. If you are always the one talking or teaching, consider doing small-group work or paired activities that will keep all children engaged. If it is during quiet work time, position the student closest to where you will be. Proximity to a teacher is a quick and easy intervention. If this doesn't work, check for understanding of the expected work. The student may be trying to get your attention, but doesn't know how. Make sure students always know what they can do when they have finished their work. Off-task behaviors are a common occurrence during waiting times, as students are unsure of what to do next.

For a better understanding of what a student might be feeling, or for some additional ways to help students stay on-task, see 'suggestions from a student' below.

Suggestions from a Student

- Help me get involved in activities that I may seem disinterested in.
- Have me sit close to the front of the classroom to keep my attention.
- Give me only a few directions at a time.

- Have the agenda on the board or a “To Do” list
- Offer a goal (such as remembering one or two things) and encourage me to meet it with an incentive.
- Give me positive feedback if I join in the discussion.
- Ask me for an answer to make sure I’m paying attention.
- Offer me something to occupy my hands (coloring, drawing).
- Allow time for breaks during long periods.
- Tap my desk or walk by if it looks like I’m not paying attention.
- I may try to get your attention by doing things I should not do. Please ignore this behavior.
- I may need encouragement for sitting and paying attention for a long time.
- Stay close to me so that I can stay focused more easily.
- Let me pick what I want to read.
- Give me choices of what to read.

Also consider:

Increasing engaged time

Posting classroom expectations

Effective classroom

Teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: Instructional strategies and practices

Keywords: Off-task, Attention, Non-compliance, Distracted, Disengaged, Distractions, Unfocused, Preoccupied, Inattentive, Sidetrack