5 Ways to Maximize Attention and Boost Memory

*by*[*Dr. Randy Kulman*](http://learningworksforkids.com/author/randy/)

For children who struggle with focus and find it hard to pay attention, taking some simple steps to improve [Working Memory](http://learningworksforkids.com/2013/04/5-ways-to-maximize-attention-and-boost-memory/Working%20Memory) may prove beneficial. Keen memory can help boost concentration, expanding the capacity to hold more information in mind over longer periods of time. Cogmed Working Memory Training offers an intense regimen designed to improve memory, but doesn’t generalize the varied uses of the skill — crucial for knowing how to apply it in real life. Below, you’ll five simple activities that not only practice Working Memory in a variety of ways, but apply those skills to tasks that demand attention and focus.

**1.) Play visual recognition games, like I Spy.**You can improve visual memory by learning to pay close attention to things in your environment. Ask your child to take some time to look very carefully at something, and then without it being present, to describe it in great detail. For example, look carefully at a piece of art, a tree, a rock, or a house and then look away and try to describe as much of it as you can. Pay attention to visual details, colors, contours, contrasts, and shape. Then work to use your verbal skills to describe the visual memories as best you can.

**2.) Exercise on a regular basis to improve memory, attention, and learning.**New data from a study by [Kamijo et al](http://kch.illinois.edu/research/labs/neurocognitive-kinesiology/files/Articles/Hillman_2011_AReviewOfChronic.)(2011) strongly indicates that physical activity that improves cardiovascular functioning also improves working memory. [Other studies](http://kch.illinois.edu/research/labs/neurocognitive-kinesiology/files/Articles/Pontifex_2012_ExerciseImproveBehavioralNeurocognitive.pdf) strongly support the connection between vigorous exercise and improved attention. Encourage your child to be physically active for an hour, working out vigorously to the point where he is sweating in order to receive these benefits.

**3.) Learn yoga and meditation to improve working memory.** Yoga training, particularly the kind that focuses on breathing and mindfulness, has been demonstrated to improve executive functioning, working memory, and attention in younger children. [Many studies](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/opinion/sunday/the-power-of-concentration.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) strongly support the concept of using these techniques to augment other forms of [working-memory interventions](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8rRzTtP7Tc). The jury is still out, however, on whether or not the stretches directly improve memory, but they’re sure to make you limber!

**4.) Play a story-building game with your child.** Ask your child to concentrate on remembering as many facets of a story as he can. Provide a start to the story such as “Once there was an 8-year-old girl who enjoyed being outdoors,” then take turns adding sentences to the story — without writing any of it down. This practices memory and focus in tandem, because each person needs to listen intently to new lines added, and retell the story from the beginning on every turn. Try allowing each other to paraphrase at first, and then require the recollection of exact phrasing to increase difficulty.

**5.) Play popular family games such as Memory and Concentration.** These games require you to focus closely at cards as they are revealed, and then use visuo-spatial memory skills when taking a turn. Switch games to keep your child’s interest, playing increasingly more complex games like Mastermind and [Distraction](http://www.liveoakgames.com/distraction/) once the easier ones have been mastered. Discuss with each other the strategies you used to improve.