

GONGE® INSIGHTS

By physiotherapist Hannah Harboe

River and visual focusing

Visual focusing: Sight is the sense that easily takes up the most of our brain capacity. For people with sight, it accounts for many links in the brain's neural networks. It's also a strong, assertive sense, and it can therefore be hard to keep focus and filter out irrelevant visual impressions, especially for children.

When we need to disseminate the many new impressions we receive via sight, it's easy to lose focus and thus attention. Small children often find it a problem to sit and read a book when the room is full of other activities and movement, which their eyes cannot filter out and that attract their attention.

As our brains develop and we gain more experience, most of us get better at filtering out irrelevant visual stimuli maintaining focus.

But some children still have problems when starting school. It can be hard to maintain attention and avoid being disturbed by the movements and visual impressions coming from all the other children in a class. To improve maintaining focus takes practice in filtering out irrelevant stimuli.

When training focus, the child must be involved and know what is being trained. The activity should be arranged to ensure the child succeeds and experiences a feeling of mastery and success. Through mastery and a positive response, the child will perceive the benefits of being able to filter and maintain focus. It's precisely that feeling of achievement when making an effort that helps the brain to slowly seek more of the same success.

Through repetition of filtering, new neural networks are formed. New paths in the brain are literally formed. When a new path has become well worn, making it a clear and easy path to walk, it's safe to say that a form of automation has occurred.

River: The elements in River come in many clear colours that can be built into a long pathway with varying colours. The clear distinction between the colours helps make River ideal when children are working with filtering and maintaining focus.

Moving on River requires balance, and all exercises requiring balance help maintain attention. Training on River can be easily progressed. Building two parallel lines makes them easier to walk on. Building a single line that twists like a river makes it harder. River can also be combined with River Stones, introducing differences in height.

When playing on River, children will often move forwards using their sight to guide them to the next colour in the series.

When an adult asks them to step on a certain colour, which can either be in front or behind them, the child must control its natural tendency to move forwards to the next element.



Art 2123 River

Case:

Molly is 6 and a lively, happy girl. She's in 1st grade and finds it hard in school, as she struggles with physical coordination and attention. Her teacher says that Molly is easily distracted by the movements of the other children and finds it hard to concentrate. Her eyes register every movement in the class, which prevents her from focusing and finishing what she's doing.

At home, her parents do not have the same perception. Molly can concentrate there on bead plates or jigsaw puzzles easily enough. She is an only child, and the home is a calm place. Her parents are very aware of avoiding having the TV on, music playing or other distractions around Molly when she needs to concentrate.

During Molly's first consultation, I noticed that her eyes move constantly while I talk to her. She finds it hard to maintain contact with me and is constantly diverted by whatever she sees in the room.

I talk to her parents and Molly about needing to start training Molly's ability to focus. I ask her parents to be aware of helping Molly by not following and commenting on everything she spots when working on other tasks.

They were asked to point in the direction where she should be focusing instead. When Molly finishes the task set, they could tell her that they would now like to see and talk about the thing she spotted earlier.

They should also praise her for finishing and maintaining her focus. During training, Molly had a go at River. I tell her which colours to step on. She has to maintain her focus and only move one leg at a time. Some steps are long and some backwards, which requires balance and full attention. Molly manages the entire line with good concentration and receives praise from me and her parents for her ability to maintain her focus and find the right colours. She often took a step forward to the next colour in the sequence before I even said anything but realises it herself and corrects by stepping back. In such situations, she receives extra praise for correcting a mistake and being observant.

I recommend that Molly changes place at school to sit close to the teacher, with most of her classmates behind her. Having less movement around her helps her focus. As Molly becomes calmer and those around her become more aware of giving praise when she maintains her focus, she improves rapidly.

In other words, Molly learns to maintain focus by the adults being aware and giving praise when she focuses or refocuses when her attention wanders.



See you next time in
Gonge Insights
- or visit us at
www.gonge.com

