

The Neuroscience of Hyperfocus: Why Your Child Might “Tune You Out”

What This Article Is About

When your child is locked into a LEGO tower or drawing, it's not defiance — it's hyperfocus. Their attention spotlight is fixed, and shifting it takes more effort (and more time) for kids than adults. Bottom-up attention (“Ooh, shiny!”) dominates in childhood, while top-down attention (“I choose to focus”) is still wiring up.

What You Might Notice

- Not responding when you call their name
- Meltdowns when pulled out of favorite activities
- Jumping attention between things in fast bursts
- Needing longer pauses before shifting to a new task

Quick Strategies

- **If They Don't Answer:** Wait 5–10 seconds, give countdown warnings, use a timer, bridge transitions (e.g., “Take a photo of your build”).
- **If Transitions Cause Meltdowns:** Use 10–5–2 minute warnings, let them finish a step, provide rituals to mark the switch.
- **If Attention Jumps:** Seat away from distractions, rotate novelty into tasks, allow fidgets or posture changes.
- **If Environment Shapes Focus:** Identify best focus spots, reduce sensory overload, map their daily rhythms.

Parent Takeaway

Hyperfocus is a superpower, not a flaw. The challenge isn't helping your child pay attention — it's helping them shift attention smoothly while protecting their strengths.