

## Week 2: Keeping Attention

Getting attention in the short term can be relatively easy. *Keeping* attention for extended periods of time can be really difficult some days. Students get restless and need to take a break. They can be easily distracted by anything: a voice over the loudspeaker, a knock on the door, or even the way you move around the room. If the classroom is messy or disorganized, many students have trouble maintaining focus. And even if you have established a calm atmosphere in the class, kids may need a small jolt to get back on track.

By the end of this week, you will have five skills that will help you know when students need a break, and strategies to refresh their attention and keep the learning going. You will learn how to create an environment that helps your students pay attention to what's important in the classroom.

There are five components for keeping attention in Week Two:

**MONDAY** *Needing a Break*

**THURSDAY** *Vary the Routine*

**TUESDAY** *Taking a Break*

**FRIDAY** *Kinesthetic Learning*

**WEDNESDAY** *Eliminate Distractions*

# Taking a Break



Now that you've learned how to notice when the students need a break, today you will learn how to give students a break while maintaining control of the classroom.

Students of all ages can focus attention only for a finite period of time. If students have been sitting too long and their bodies are getting stiff and tired, that may affect their ability to concentrate.

The part of the brain responsible for coordinating movement is the cerebellum, which means "little brain" in Latin. We need to keep the cerebellum active during learning, and movement is one of the best ways to do it. Moving stimulates learning, memory, language development, and attention.

That's why these ideas to refresh the class involve movement of some kind. When you notice that your students have lost attention and need a break, don't just stop teaching and let students have free time until you feel like they are refreshed. Keep control of the breaks to make them most effective. These break ideas are teacher-facilitated activities that give students a break in a structured way to help them get re-energized and ready for work again quickly.

## HERE'S THE RESEARCH

The cerebellum is also connected to learning, language (Booth et al., 2007), memory (Desmond et al., 1997) and attention (Courchesne and Allen, 1997).

## Skill: Refresh the Class

### Here's how to do it:

First, use your knowledge from yesterday's observations to recognize signs that your students may need a break. Then try one of the following break ideas to refresh the students. Use your judgment to decide when the short, medium, or long break will do the trick. For practice, try to use each kind of break at least once today. You may notice your students need more than three breaks today, but for now, make sure you use each type of break idea at least once a day while you're learning this skill. And when you call for the break, do it along with your students—teachers need to be re-energized, too!

Two elements are key to this break:

- They can't sit down while the song is playing. This encourages activation of the calf muscle pump and helps stimulate blood flow to the brain.
- They must be sitting down and ready to work when the song ends. Give them a five-second warning before the song stops so they can get in their seats.