

# Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Course: Focused Mindset

Level: Elementary



**Objective:** Students will be able to describe the ability to focus, list the benefits of being focused and attentive, identify differences between a **focused** and **unfocused mindset**, and practice ways to improve focus.

**Course Intent:** Provide information and exercises for students to understand, apply and consistently practice the essential components of focus and attention.

## Applications & Benefits:

Teaching students to have a focused mindset while they are in the classroom can help them improve their classroom performance, retain information better, and accomplish tasks more readily.



## Course Snapshot

This course incorporates the following lessons.

LESSONS	ACTIVITY	TIME REQUIRED	RESOURCES & MATERIALS NEEDED
<b>#1</b> Introductory Lesson: A Focused Mindset and How to Get One	Group Activity Demonstration  Whole Group Discussion	10 – 15 minutes	- Lesson definitions - Blindfold - Ping pong balls - Small jar - Basket
<b>#2</b> Focused vs Unfocused, Benefits of a Focused Mind	Group Activity  Discussion	10– 25 minutes	- Toilet paper rolls (or rolled up paper) - Chart paper
<b>#3</b> Remember, Practice Makes Better	Individual and Partner Exercises	5 – 10 minutes, various activities	Lesson information



## Lesson Rationale:

Strong memory and attention skills in young children have been shown to predict later academic achievement in math and reading comprehension. Focus and attention are closely related to our working memory; what we focus on filters what we allow into our working memory (which in turn decides whether to store information in long-term or short-term memory). Attention and working memory are both executive functions, used to help children learn.

One way that teachers can support students' skills of attention and focus is by helping students practice specific strategies. A focused mindset can help prepare students for learning, retain information, increase productivity, and attend to projects or independent work. A focused mind is also beneficial to our social relationships because our relationships grow when we actively listen and respond to others.

### HELPFUL TIPS

- If you can, reduce the number of visual distractions in the classroom. Overly decorated rooms can take student's attention away from the assignments they are working on.
- Giving students only one task at a time can also help them to focus on what they are working on and not get too distracted with the idea of multi-tasking.
- Try to move around the classroom to keep student's attention, instead of staying stationary in front of the classroom.
- Place students who get distracted easily in desks in the front of the class, so that they can focus on you and not classmates.
- Mix it up, plan fun and exciting lesson plans to keep students on their toes and keep lessons from becoming predictable.



## Introductory

### Lesson #1:

A Focused Mindset  
and How to Get One

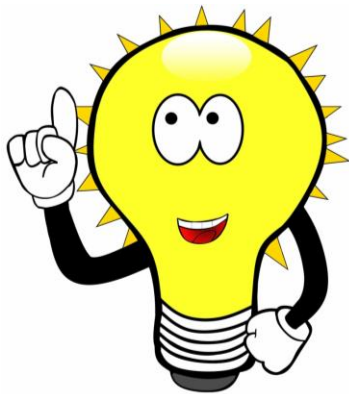
## Definitions

### What does it mean to have a Focused Mindset?

A **focused mind** is one that can direct its center of interest to a subject and block out distractions. Focus and attention are central to helping you filter what is important and what is not. A focused mind is one that is not easily distracted and is able to return to a task after a brief interruption. What you focus on, you get more of!

### Interesting Fact

Ancient Cherokee Wolf Tale: There are two hungry wolves within your mind, racing each other for control. The positive wolf is hungry for positive thoughts and the negative one is hungry for negative thoughts. Which wolf will win the race? The one you feed. Keep negative thoughts to a minimum and the positive wolf will win.



### How to Become More Focused:

- Being able to focus well, takes time and practice.
- Identify things that distract you and make a conscious effort to avoid those things. Does a friend try to talk to you while the teacher is talking? Do you think about the movie you watched last night instead of focusing on your classroom assignment? Realizing what distracts you is the first step in developing a focused mindset.
- At the beginning, it can be hard to train your brain to avoid instances that grab its attention, but if you keep practicing and persevering, your brain will become better and better at ignoring pesky distractions so that you can focus on the task in front of you.
- “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”  
Results don’t happen overnight, keep working on building a focused mindset and you will develop one.



## Activity

This activity serves as a visual model for students to understand how attention and memory are related to help them retain information.

Before the lesson, find a large basket, a very small jar to represent the brain and ping pong balls to represent the information we let in.

For another part of the activity, you will need to prepare a small obstacle course in your classroom, by either using masking tape on the floor or moving desks and chairs around. You will also need a blindfold.

Ask for a student volunteer to be blindfolded. Tell them that their goal will be to follow the maze by only listening to your directions. Have the student go to the starting point, spin them around a few times, and begin.

Tell the rest of the class to move around, make noise, and maybe even tell the student to go in a different direction. Just remind them not to yell or scream above each other. They can whistle, stamp their feet, clap, cough etc. Your directions will guide the student to the end of the obstacle.

Once the student is finished, have everyone return to the whole group and have the student share their experience. Ask what they struggled with and what strategies they used to keep their focus on you.

Then, explore the concept of a focused mindset. Explain that having a focused mindset means that you are attending to what is important and blocking out distractions. It means that you can filter what information you need to pay attention to. Using the ping pong balls and small jar, explain that the jar is like our brain and the ping pong balls are things around us that are distracting or need our attention.

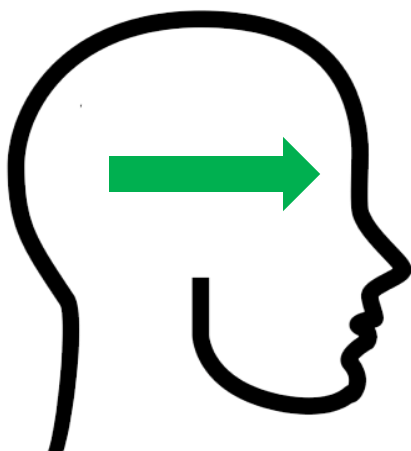
Ask students, "When we are working on math, what are some things we need to focus on?" Answers may include the teacher, the directions, what numbers are in the problem, what the question is, etc. As students provide you with answers, take the ping pong balls from the basket and put them in the jar. The jar represents what we need to focus on. Then, ask students what the other ping pong balls might represent, or what are the distractions. Ideas might include someone sharpening a pencil, hearing people in the hallway, watching the clock and waiting for lunch, looking at the Star Student chart, etc. Explain that our brains will then take the information that we've focused on and decide if we need it in our long-term or short-term memory.



## Lesson #2:

Focused vs Unfocused,  
Benefits of a  
Focused Mind

### What to Know Before You Begin:



#### Focused Mind

Able to focus quickly  
Retains Information  
Homework is easy  
Good Test Taker  
Excellent Multi-tasker



#### Unfocused Mindset

Gets distracted easily  
Doesn't remember  
Homework is difficult  
Poor Test Skills  
Cannot Multi-task



## Activity

### **What's Distracting You?**

For this activity, you will need either one toilet paper roll per student, or one rolled up piece of paper (to mimic a telescope). Hold off on handing these out until it is time to avoid them being a distraction!

Prepare to write the students' responses on chart paper. Begin by asking students to look around the room and think about what might be distracting for them. Do this twice; the first time, ask students to cover their ears and only list what they can see. Next, ask the students to close their eyes for a few moments, and then recite what they can hear. List their responses on chart paper. By compiling a list and physically writing things down, students can become more aware of what distracts them and how to avoid the things that take their attention away from learning.

Explain to students that "what you focus on, you get more of." Pass out the toilet paper rolls or rolled paper tubes. Ask students to use them to look around the room and find something they maybe haven't noticed. Explain that using the "telescope" to focus their attention helps them with the task. Use these again for another demonstration. Have students work in pairs and use the tubes as a "telephone" this time. Have them talk back and forth and focus on what each other is saying.

Lastly, make a T chart with the students like the one in the lesson introduction. Write Focused Mind on one side and Unfocused Mind on the other. Brainstorm (and use the provided chart as a reference) and list with students the differences between being focused or unfocused.



## Lesson #3:

Practice  
Makes Perfect

### What to Know Before You Begin

Even though the adage says “Practice Makes Perfect,” that can have negative implications for a student’s growth mindset. Growth mindset refers to the idea that we have the potential to keep learning and growing. Practice doesn’t always make perfect, but it does make us *better than we were before*. See the Growth Mindset course for more information.

### Activity

Model and practice the following activities with students to improve their focus and attention. Some of these activities need to be deliberately planned for by a teacher to support students, while other exercises students can learn to practice on their own.

#### **Stop and Talk**

During a lesson, allow time for students to stop and talk to a neighbor about what they just heard. Plan to do this a few times during the lesson and students will naturally begin to focus so that they have something to say next time you ask them to stop and talk.

#### **Create a Visual**

Tell students that one strategy for focus is to make a visual picture in their mind to help them remember something. When you are starting a new concept, use Think Aloud to explain to students how you are going to visualize the concept in your head. For example, if you are introducing a new math addition problem, you might say, “I have 18 of something and I need to add 5 more. I am going to think of stars in my head and count the stars.”

#### **Teach a Friend**

Similar to Stop and Talk, provide students with opportunities to teach each other. After a whole group lesson, provide students with a problem or question and ask them to teach it to a partner. Then, ask another question or provide another problem and have them switch roles.



## Make Connections

Tell students that a strategy for focus is to make personal connections. Ask them to think about how they might make a connection or association to a problem. The mnemonic PEMDAS is a helpful example for math.

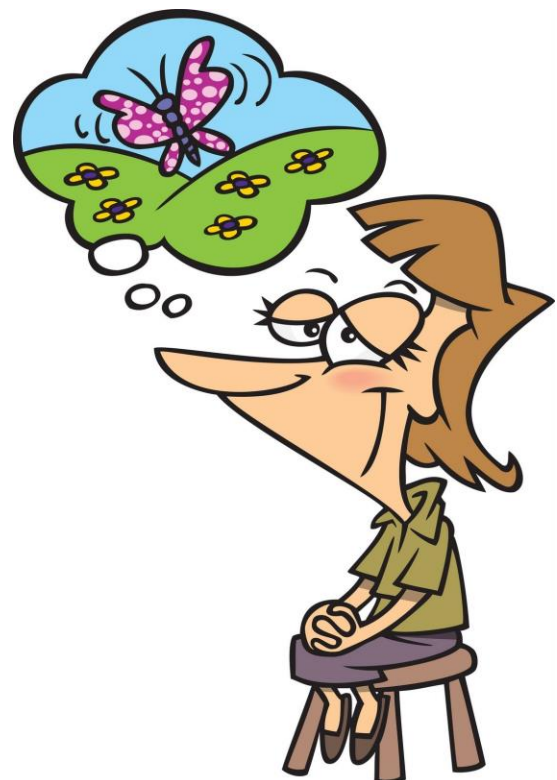
## Memory Game:

Explain that choosing which memories to focus on and which memories to ignore are choices that directly impact your mood, state of mind and your mental stamina. Concentrating on a negative memory can drain you of energy and strength, making it difficult to maintain Resilience.

Ask students to think of a memory that brings a great deal of happiness and tell them to concentrate on it for 15 seconds (think about the place, the time, who they were with and why they were so happy). When the 15 seconds are complete, ask them to focus on a memory of a sad situation for 10 seconds (a situation they were uncomfortable with, one they wish never happened).

Now ask the students to focus back on the memory of the happy situation for 15 more seconds. Ask them to imagine that they are explaining the situation to a friend for the first time and tell them to describe it in their mind. Tell them to focus on their happiness.

The goal of the exercise is to purposely control your emotions by controlling what you think about and for how long you think about it. The more minutes you focus on positive experiences, memories and aspects of life, the happier your state of mind will be. It's not how many bad experiences you have, but what you choose to concentrate on that determines your state of mind. Give the positive memories a lot of time and limit the bad memories to very little or no time.







## Quick Quiz

1. What are characteristics of a focused mindset?

- A.) Easily distracted by everything
- B.) Inability to multi-task well
- C.) Ability to focus quickly
- D.) Difficult time remembering

2. How can we improve our focus?

- A.) By avoiding things that can distract us
- B.) Limiting our attention to one thing at a time
- C.) Paying attention in class
- D.) All of the above

3. What can you do to obtain a focused mindset?

- A.) Daydream in class
- B.) Talk while the teacher talks
- C.) Practice strategies that help you focus
- D.) There is nothing you can do

### Teacher Feedback

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content above.  
Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, constructive criticism.  
Email your feedback to: [info@mylearningtools.org](mailto:info@mylearningtools.org)