Give Your Mind Permission to Be in the Same Place as Your Body:

- Permission to resume other tasks later. *Let the future and the past stay there.*
- Permission not to fight notifications. *Let your devices rest and turn on do not disturb.*
- Permission to take care of your body. *Choose to sit, stand, or move unobtrusively, as needed.*

Please describe one of the following to your neighbor...

- a situation in your own life when your distraction led to embarrassing or less-than-ideal results
- a time when your frustration with your child’s distraction led to a less-than-stellar parenting moment for you
- a time when you missed a magical moment with your child because your attention was elsewhere

*Humor is welcome but not required!*

Please describe one of the following to your neighbor...

- What does inattention look like with your students?
- What are you seeing in your classrooms, schools, or homes?
“Take Five”
Engaging the prefrontal cortex & executive function by noticing one of the following:

- 5 breaths
- 5 sensations in the body
- 5 sounds you hear
- 5 things you’ve never seen in this space before

Key Session Components
1. The biological mechanisms underlying our attention
2. The distinction between top down & bottom up attention, i.e. “focus” & “distraction”
3. Practical applications for working with attention in the classroom setting

The “Crisis” of Attention

The demands on our attention are real.
In particular:

- the many stimuli of the electronic age and social media
- the quick pace and “unnatural” schedules imposed on us by our modern lives
The “Crisis” of Attention: What are we really worried about?

- What is it that frustrates or worries you personally when your children are not paying attention (to you or in general)?
- What do you imagine is happening or will happen as a result?

As educators, what are we worried about?

- It’s disrespectful
- Other people’s perception of my teaching
- Kids’ wrong/bad priorities
- Their learning/future
- Their social development
- Their health

Understanding Attention: How does it work in the body?

Practice: Fixed Attention

Choose a static object for your attention:
- the sensation of your feet on the floor
- a fixed point in the room to look at
Pay attention to this and only this.
**Practice: Shifting Attention**

Let your attention rest on the various objects that I suggest for you as I call them.

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**Debrief:**

What did you notice?
*(Note: there is absolutely no right answer here.)*

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*The “mechanism” of attention hasn’t fundamentally changed in 40,000 years*

- “built” for the stimuli of hunting & gathering
- moving towards important rewards (food, reproduction)
- moving away from threats (predators, enemies)
- privileges novelty & new information

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Remember How Attention Works in Our Brains:

**Primate (“Rational”) Brain**
- Strategy
- Reflection
- Choice

**Reptilian (“Survival”) Brain**
- Danger
- Reward
- Instinct
“Mindful” vs. “Mindless” Attention:

[Image]

**Stimulus**

**Instinctive Reaction**

**Conscious Choice**

1. Got to the bottom of a page without knowing what you just read?
2. Rehearsed a conversation (in your head or aloud) with a person who wasn’t there? Multiple times?
3. Been listening to someone but when they ask you a question, you have no idea what they were saying?
4. Driven somewhere without remembering the drive itself?
5. Forgotten whether or not you already used shampoo while showering?

In recent memory, have you...

Autopilot: “Mindless” Attention

- The natural tendency of the mind to tune out because the brain knows how to do a task without thinking
- Where we spend most of our waking life if we never learned to pay attention

Two Types of Attention

- **Top Down:** (intentional) conscious choice to place attention on a given target
- **Bottom Up:** (stimulus-driven) attention is “called” to a target by an outside stimulus
Top-Down or “Mindful” Attention

- paying attention on purpose to what’s happening in the present moment, and without judging it
- observing, rather than trying to change, our present circumstances and surroundings
- it is NOT the absence of thoughts or distractions; it’s the ability to stay/come back

Three Helpful Ways to Think about Attention

#1 Safety First!
- Nervous system arousal (response to perceived threat or “needed action”) impacts attention
- The zone of optimal arousal corresponds with learning readiness
Safety First!

- Your own grounded, stable presence matters
- Notice and manage what's happening in your own system
- The nervous system is collective

Safety First!

- Anger & opposition (threats) incline the system toward instinct rather than choice for attention
- Call students in instead of out

Attention is always somewhere

- Distraction is not a problem that needs to be fixed or solved
- It’s natural; attention works this way
Attention is always somewhere

- The question isn’t “why aren’t they paying attention to me?”
- It’s: “Where is the attention and why?”
- Imagine attention from their perspective: why might this be absorbing?

A Case Study in (not) paying attention:
Stories hold attention longer!

Notice...
Where is your attention right now?

#3
Attention is a “capacity” that can be grown

- Neuroplasticity: use it or lose it
- Regular practice helps develop executive control:
  - top down attention
  - immersive (sustained) attention

Attention is a “capacity” that can be grown

- Practice/model top down attention regularly
- Allow children to notice where their attention is and choose (top down) to come back
- Allow for immersive attention; notice and be careful of when you interrupt it

Practice (or “Brain Break”)

Let your attention rest on a neutral, non-static object. When (not if) you notice you’re distracted, bring it back.
Additional Considerations

- Autonomy
- Relatedness
- Competence

Reflect:

- A new question that arises for you.
- Something to which you’ll try to pay more attention.
- Something you might try to incorporate (more) in your life as an educator.

Questions? Contact?
Alan Brown
alan@learningtothrive.nyc
www.learningtothrive.nyc