

Focus

Noun

the centre of interest or activity

Focus

Ethos of Learning

"It is a pretty tough task to concentrate at school 5 hours a day. At times you will lose focus. Even parts of my beloved Geography are a little dull. Trying to get your hand up as often as possible can help with forcing you to remain focused and if nothing else it's a bit of exercise!"

Alex Wallace, Deputy Headmaster

"Stay focused!" How often do we hear this phrase? How often do I say it to myself? It was so much easier to stay focused when I was a young lad. I grew up in North Devon, the internet was barely around and certainly a million miles away from reaching the depths of the South West. No one had a mobile phone. If you wanted to call someone you had to wind the number round the dial of the telephone and by the time you eventually completed dialling you did not stand a chance of remembering what you were calling about in the first place!

My biggest distractions were my four siblings, or as my mother called them: "childcare". Life was much easier, we never locked the front door, we were free to roam the fields without fear of abduction, our main tasks were bike riding, playing sport and being fed! The best thing was, we never had to post, facebook, tweet, snapchat or Instagram about it. If we were doing something, we were doing it for ourselves, because it was fun, but there was no need or option to share that with the rest of the world.

Modern day life is very different and probably a lot tougher for this generation. You may not like all the social media available to us, but it is part of life and, when used well, can bring huge benefits. But there is no doubt it is also a distraction. It is difficult to stay focused on the Maths homework when you're waiting on that

crucial Whatsapp message. It's hard to truly practice your French verbs when all you want to do is get straight back to the Xbox which seems to have some kind of magnetic hold over you! It is difficult to be successful at a task when you are distracted.

When my wife has drawn the short straw and it is her turn to sort the washing, it takes her twice as long as it takes me. The reason is that she insists on doing it whilst watching "I'm a Celebrity". She says it makes the task less onerous, which is a fair point, but it does take her double the time because she is not focused.

So, how can you stay focused with all these distractions so close at hand? Firstly, you need to decide whether the task needs your full attention. In the example above, it is ok not to be fully focused as a fairly dull task is made more enjoyable by having the distraction; that would not be the case if she was marking a student's homework or doing a tax return.

I generally have my office door open all the time. However, if I need to be particularly focused on a piece of work I do close the door and make sure my phone is nowhere near me. I would highly recommend not having any social media near you when you do your homework. Ideally you would take a short break every half an hour and just check it then before you go back to undistracted work. I would try to limit your gaming time. I think face to face interactions are far more important and valuable to you and your nearest and dearest.

It is also a fair assumption that being expected to concentrate for 6 hours a day is completely unrealistic. As a young lad I struggled to concentrate for an episode of Neighbours let alone 6 hours! It is important that you split up the day with regular breaks. I try to get out and around the school a number of times a day. This is a win-win exercise for me in that I get to see how the day is progressing across the school and often see exceptional learning, and I also get that break from my office so when I return I can be a little rested and ready to focus again.

At the beginning of the article I mentioned that life is tougher for this generation to stay focused. However, maybe they don't need to be as focused for such long periods as all the information they need is only a few clicks away. For my generation research meant getting to a library, finding the right book, finding the right extract to remind myself of the exact date of the Spanish Armada! Maybe, it was and is tough for both of us, but it is how we manage our tasks that is important.

A final thought...

Parents, do try to encourage your young men to do their homework without their phone in the same room. Encourage your son to just give it a try. You don't play the trombone, give a speech or catch a rugby ball whilst trying to text because these activities require focus, just like homework!

For further information on the Ethos of Learning please refer to the RGS website: rgshw.com or Alex Wallace, Deputy Headmaster, arw@rgshw.com