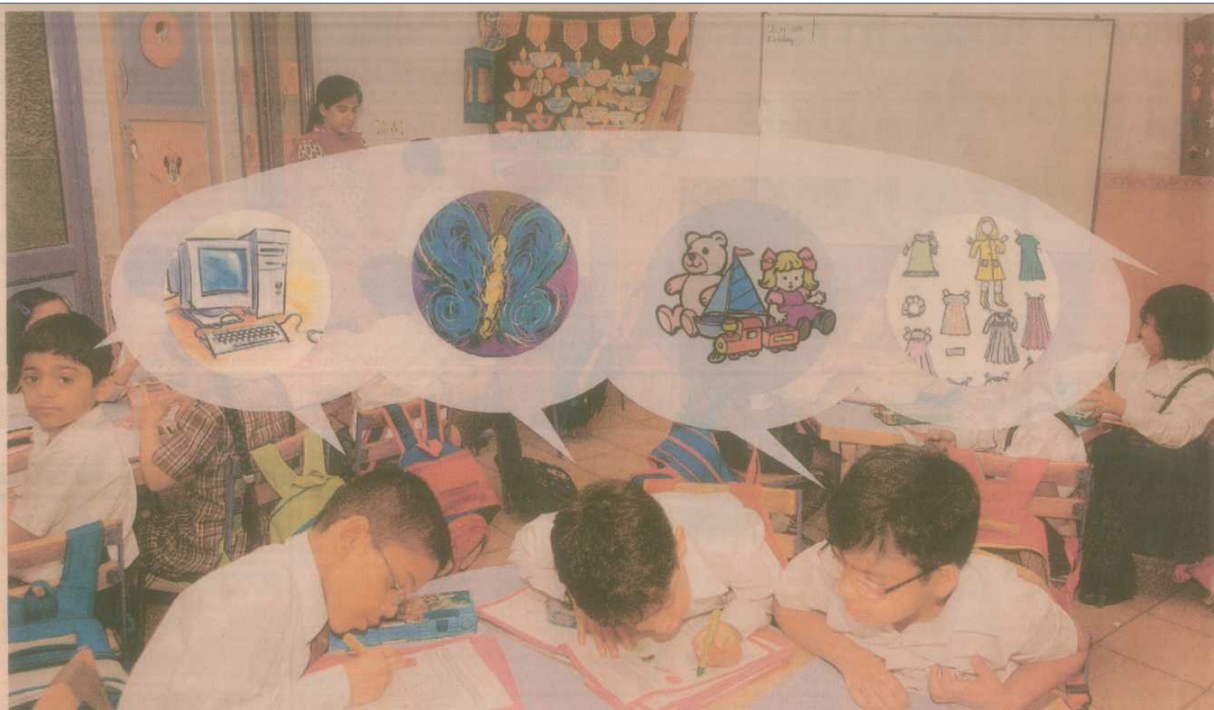


THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

GET THEIR ATTENTION

- Don't force your child to study. Instead set a study routine, so that it doesn't seem a burden to him
- Set a routine for sleep too. But before you do that analyse your child's temperament — some children find it easy to concentrate in the morning and others bloom during late evenings
- Remove distractions like phone, TV etc from the area of study. Get them a study table and chair. It works better than a couch or a bed
- Set a task for them and don't feed them heavily just before study time
- Identify your child's interest and help your child grow in the subject that he/she enjoys. It is important for your child to know that 'you are there'



Time to pay some attention

Attention disorders are one of the most common behavioural problems that children are facing today

Kiran Yadav

TEN-year-old Kartik Rajan can barely manage to sit through a lesson. While his mother tries to draw his attention to a Wren & Martin chapter, he reaches out for the Scooby-Doo kept in the toy box and tries to make it jump. A while earlier he was unsuccessfully trying to juggle with his Parker pens. And that wasn't before he had scribbled endlessly in his notebook. Nouns and adjectives didn't seem to excite him enough — he'd rather try his hand at making a

complicated-looking fire engine with the Lego blocks.

It was a daily ritual and Mrs Rajan had mastered the art of not losing patience easily. She subscribed to the conventional school of thought despite the fact that Kartik's grades had increasingly suffered — "children are supposed to be cranky, lost-in-their-own-world, and extremely difficult to pin down." She had seen *Taars Zameen Par* and the little she could gather from it made her convinced that Kartik didn't suffer from dyslexia.

Still, it would have done her good to

consult a doctor. "Impulsiveness, lack of concentration and hyperaction are three typical characteristics of children suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Unfortunately, the number of children suffering from it have more than doubled, from 5% to 12%, in the last decade," says Dr Sunita Sodhi, director, Educare Centre.

The Centre works with children suffering with learning difficulties. While Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is strictly a neurological problem, a lot of other children are, simply put, finding it difficult

to concentrate.

A study published in the medical journal *Pediatrics* has maintained that children who watched the most television also had the shortest attention spans. In a few cases, all it took was an extra hour of television viewing a day to increase the odds of developing concentration problems by 10%, the researchers found. The link between television viewing and decreased attention spans may not be as strong though.

Attention disorders are one of the most common behavioural problems that children are facing today. There are a lot more variables other than TV that determine a child's attention span.

In a study conducted recently, Ritika Samadar, dietitian with Max hospital, Delhi found that a good breakfast can remarkably improve the attention span of the child. "The child's ability to do mathematics increased significantly after a good breakfast," says Samadar further explaining that the "brain needs glucose to function properly. An extended fast of over ten hours, in the event of a missed or poor breakfast, leads to a situation of hypoxia — or lack of oxygen supply to the brain. Junk food and caffeine, for instance, makes them aggressive in nature, while milk helps in calming their nerves."

SUBDUED SYMPTOMS

Most children show a few symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity, inattention or a combination of all. To be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, children should have at least six attention symptoms or six activity and impulsivity symptoms — a degree beyond what would be expected for children their age. A few symptoms are:

- The child finds it difficult to retain attention in work or even play
- Easily gets distracted.
- Seems to be hyperactive.
- Always ready to be on the go
- Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly

Quite a useful tip there indeed.

Dr Sodhi strongly asserts on the role of "routine." The parents must make the child eat and sleep at regular intervals, she says adding that "TV viewing must be limited to an hour

each day." While parenting may come across as a formidable task for most, the rules can be pretty simple. "Your childhood can provide important clues," she says. That sums up a lot really. Consider the piping-hot *dosa* or *parathas* with curd that you had for breakfast... the cricket game in the neighbourhood park each evening with the sweat trickling down the brow. And just an hour of *Doordarshan* was the staple of the lot. The pizzas and the burgers are relatively new entrants. Wouldn't you agree?

Gouri Dange, a practising counsellor based in Pune offers an interesting insight in her latest book *A B Cs of Parenting*: Children today are brought to doctors and counsellors for depression, lack of concentration, slow physical growth, eating disorders. Most people tend to lay the blame on 'outside distractions' — TV, video games, fast food and other such externals. However, in seven out of 10 cases, there is a fairly serious relationship problem that the child is witness to in the household. The possibility of Kartik being one of the seven is quite high. It is about time Mrs Rajan withdrew from the conventional school of thought that she subscribes to.