

The Attention Builder

(Based on an article by Gina Davies)

After anything from five to 10 Bucket Full of Surprises, children are usually ready for Stage 2, the attention builder. This involves a longer activity that stretches their attention span for up to 10 minutes. It has a clear beginning, middle and end and is fascinating to watch from start to finish.



You might have a basket containing a box of flour, a sieve and a piece of black paper and a plain shower curtain to put the paper on. You draw on the board and write 'flour shaking'. Then you unroll the paper, open the box and scatter flour from a height all over the paper. That is very appealing for small children. Then you draw in it. And finally, you tip the flour back into the box and start the whole process all over again. You might do that three times, and then you say: 'It's finished.'

If a child wants to join in, that's great, because it means they are engaged. But you gently tell them, 'It's XXXX's turn', and they accept this, because they have become used to the idea that your role is to show them things while theirs is to relax and enjoy watching.

Have lots of these very visually engaging activities – the sorts of things you might well have already laid out in your nursery setting, in the hope that children will have a go. Just add a bit of colour, structure and imagination so that a child who finds it difficult to concentrate or tolerate the adult-led agenda is won over.

All children will enjoy the Attention Builder activity, but for a child with autism, the combination of structure and visual appeal makes it possible for them to take the risk of joining in, concentrating, processing any language and communication opportunities you might put into the session.

Attention builder ideas:

- Foam & paint – move cars through it
- Black paper and glitter – cover objects to create silhouettes
- Foam and flower pots – filling, up-turning and pushing down
- Dry sand pouring from a height
- Squeezy bottles of paint to splosh onto the shower curtain
- Stacking cups to make a pyramid and then knock over
- Tennis balls in a bucket and emptying into another container