

altogether. When that dynamic is set up in a child's young mind, not only is her ability to concentrate at stake, but her perseverance may be at risk as well.

Atmosphere Matters

Life is busy and noisy. I'm not suggesting we shut children in a soundproof booth. But do pay attention to the atmosphere in which children play. I like to tell parents to think of a young child's playtime as homework. When older children do homework, the TV is usually off. The same rules should apply for little ones, whether at home or in a childcare or school setting.

Joint Attention

And please understand that there's a world of difference between your participation in playtime and the disembodied intrusion of a screen. That's because you provide the child with the exact social interaction she needs to learn language (and a whole lot more!). Experts call this *joint attention*.²⁵

For instance, when a parent or caregiver is looking at something, young babies' attention is drawn to the same thing. As you play with a child, you naturally talk about what you both are seeing and doing. Each time you do this, you help her understand her world while providing the words to describe it. And one day soon, she'll be the one telling you all about it!

