

Primary Advice

By Helene J. Uchida

Q ■ A hyperactive 3-year-old boy has joined my class. It is difficult for him to sit still and he meanders around the room touching everything and taking everything apart. He does not listen to me and is a distraction to the other students.
H.W., Instructor
Nagoya

A ■ Finding constructive ways to channel the energy of ‘hyperactive’ children

We tend to use the word hyperactive loosely for young children. Most young creatures have tons of energy that needs to be spent in one way or another to help them grow. Watching puppies play is the best example.

It is a challenge for energetic youngsters to sit still in the classroom and suppress the need to move around freely. Of course, teachers want students to adhere to the rules and stay within the confines of the classroom, but we also need to find ways to use their energy constructively.

We have a 3-year-old student whom I will call Yuto. His teacher told our school secretary that she could not control him. As if on a mission of his own, he walked around the room opening up and looking into every box, container, device and bag he could get his hands on. He totally ignored her and the other children. When the secretary discussed it with his mother, she volunteered to pull him out of our school so he would not disrupt the class.

I asked the mother to bring him to class one more time so I could lead the class while observing his behavior. I found him energetic and curious about everything except the lesson at hand. He wanted to look at all the objects in the room, open them up, take them apart and examine them. When I could involve him in parts of the lesson, I realized he was quick and smart. My words to the worried mother at end of the lesson were: “It’s clear that your son is an engineer. He’s a little Steve Jobs.” Her eyes filled with tears as I told her that I would teach him for one month to see if I could harness his interest. I am happy to report I am still teaching Yuto, who is now 4½. He is still energetic and curious, but he has adjusted.

How did I do it? We did it together. Somehow he knew that I respected and liked him. I removed “intriguing objects,” placed his chair close to mine, kept eye contact with him and touched his arm when he wanted to get up and “explore.” I repeated instructions firmly and nipped his adventure-seeking behavior in the bud by keeping

him busy with lesson activities, often asking him to bring me materials and put them away. I was always generous with my approval.

Suggested activities for active preschoolers include:

- * Everyone holding hands while singing the ABC song as they walk around in a circle
- * Pointing to a color poster and asking the children to go on a color hunt and touch that color
- * Assembling a puzzle based on the theme of the lesson
- * Doing a self-introduction holding a plastic, imitation microphone
- * Singing a song with actions and then letting a student lead the group as a “teacher”
- * Dancing at the end of class

In closing, I wonder what kind of preschooler Apple’s Steve Jobs was.

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Readers are encouraged to send questions to Helene J. Uchida on any themes related to teaching English to younger learners — particularly those at the primary school level — to jn-edu@yomiuri.com with “Primary Advice” in the subject line. Questions to Uchida are also accepted via postcard at “Primary Advice,” The Japan News, 1-7-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo 100-8055. Questions should preferably be written in English, accompanied by your name, occupation and the area in which you live.



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The next installment will appear Oct. 15.