MEMORY · ATTENTION & RECALL

FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS · AGES 0–6

Memory Makers

How to improve your child's memory through play

When parents ask me how to help a child remember things, I always start with the same idea: memory is not one skill, it is a whole collection of little skills — noticing, holding, and recalling — and children build them the way they build everything else, through playful, everyday practice. You do not need special materials or a screen. You need a few minutes, a willing partner, and a spirit of fun. The missions in these cards give your child's memory a daily workout that feels like play, because it is. Keep them light, follow your child's lead, and celebrate every small success — that is how good habits of attention and recall take root.

NEURAL MISSION 01

Begin with Attention

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Building the attention habits that make information memorable.*

1	**Clear the Field**	Information is difficult to remember if the child never attended to it clearly. Before asking a child to remember, reduce background distractions and make sure the child knows what matters.
2	**Name to Notice**	For a visual game, name each object as it is placed.
3	**Eyes and a Short Sequence**	For a direction, make eye contact and use a short sequence.
4	**Pause for the Main Event**	For a story, pause to identify the main event.
5	**Give Attention a Target**	Attention does not have to be silent or still, but it does need a target.

NEURAL MISSION 02

Match the Game to the Age

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Memory play that follows the child's developmental stage.*

1	**Babies**	Babies practice memory when they anticipate a familiar song, search for a partly hidden toy, or expect a caregiver to reappear during peek-a-boo.
2	**Toddlers**	Toddlers can remember where an object was hidden or copy a familiar action after a short delay.
3	**Preschoolers**	Preschoolers can hold several objects, rules, or story events in mind.
4	**Follow the Progression**	Kognara's Neural Mission Series follows this progression. Object-hiding games appear during infancy, spatial memory games grow more complex in the second year, and visual working-memory, sequence, and retelling activities appear during the preschool years.

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NEURAL MISSION 03

The Memory Tray

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Visual working memory and change detection.*

1	**Set the Tray**	Place two or three familiar objects on a tray. Name them and let the child look for about ten seconds.
2	**Remove and Reveal**	Cover the tray and remove one object. Uncover it and ask what is missing.
3	**Make It Easier**	If the child struggles, use fewer objects or give a category clue.
4	**Make It Trickier**	If the child answers easily, add one object or move an item instead of removing it.
5	**Ask "What Changed?"**	Asking "What changed?" requires the child to compare the current arrangement with a stored mental image.

NEURAL MISSION 04

The Hidden-Cup Game

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Attention combined with spatial working memory.*

1	**First Hides**	For a toddler, hide a large, safe toy under one of two cups while the child watches. Ask where it is.
2	**Raise the Challenge**	When that becomes easy, add a third cup or slowly switch two positions.
3	**Keep It Followable**	Keep the movement slow enough to follow.
4	**Remember the Purpose**	The purpose is not to fool the child; it is to create a challenge the child can solve with effort.

NEURAL MISSION 05

Deferred Imitation

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Recalling and reproducing actions after a short delay.*

1	**Show a Short Action**	Tapping a block, turning it over, and placing it in a bowl.
2	**Wait, Then Ask**	Wait briefly, then offer the same materials and ask, "Do you remember what I did?"
3	**One Step at a Time**	Begin with one step. Add a second only after the first is familiar.
4	**Use Meaningful Routines**	Try putting a toy animal to bed or packing a small bag. Actions tied to a simple story can be easier to organize and recall.

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NEURAL MISSION 06

Story Sequencing

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Narrative gives memory a structure.*

1	**First, Next, Last**	Ask a child to describe what happened first, next, and last. Use three pictures, a familiar book, or an event from the day.
2	**Prompt, Don't Interrogate**	Avoid turning the conversation into an interrogation. Add prompts that support retrieval: "We put on our shoes, and then where did we go?"
3	**Fade the Clues**	Over time, use fewer clues.
4	**Listen for Understanding**	Retelling helps adults see what the child understood. A child may remember a vivid detail but miss the cause of an event. Ask, "Why did that happen?" or "What changed after that?"

NEURAL MISSION 07

Holding Directions

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Working memory used in everyday listening.*

1	**Start Small**	Start with one clear step, then move to two related steps: "Get your shoes and bring them to the door."
2	**Repeat the Plan**	Ask the child to repeat the plan before starting. Repeating converts the direction into the child's own words and creates another memory cue.
3	**Beyond Obedience**	This is not about obedience alone.
4	**Use External Supports**	For longer routines, use a visual sequence or consistent order. External supports do not weaken memory. They reduce overload and teach organization.

NEURAL MISSION 08

Movement and Rhythm

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Auditory and motor memory working together.*

1	**Clap and Copy**	Clap once, pause, and invite the child to copy.
2	**Build the Pattern**	Build to clap-stomp or two slow claps and one tap. Clapping patterns, action songs, and movement sequences combine auditory and motor memory.
3	**Why Rhythm Works**	Rhythm groups information into a predictable pattern. That is one reason songs and rhymes are easier to remember than disconnected words.

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NEURAL MISSION 09

Teach It Back

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Older preschoolers strengthen understanding by explaining.*

1	**Be the Student**	Ask the child to teach you how to build a structure, play a game, or complete a routine.
2	**What Teaching Requires**	Teaching requires the child to retrieve the steps, place them in order, monitor what the listener knows, and notice what was omitted.
3	**Ask a Genuine Question**	If the explanation is incomplete, ask a genuine question rather than taking over.

NEURAL MISSION 10

Memory Strategies

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Children can learn simple strategies instead of relying on effort alone.*

1	**Repeat Aloud**	Repeat the information aloud.
2	**Group Together**	Group similar items together.
3	**Make a Picture**	Create a picture in the mind.
4	**Connect the Familiar**	Connect new information to something familiar.
5	**Sequence Words**	Use first, next, last for a sequence.
6	**Keep a Home**	Place needed objects in a consistent location.
7	**Break It Down**	Break a long instruction into shorter parts.
8	**Model Openly**	Model these strategies openly. Say, “I need to remember keys, lunch, and a book. I am picturing all three by the door.”

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NEURAL MISSION 11

One Step at a Time

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Useful memory practice sits between automatic success and constant failure.*

1	**Change One Thing**	Add one object, one action, a slightly longer delay, or a small distraction. Do not increase everything at once.
2	**Watch Frustration**	If frustration rises, make the task easier. Children learn more from a manageable challenge they want to repeat than from a difficult test they begin to avoid.
3	**Mind the Moment**	Sleep, movement, stress, hunger, and emotion also affect memory. A tired or upset child may remember less in that moment without having a memory problem.

NEURAL MISSION 12

Memory Through Play

DEVELOPMENTAL FOCUS *Screen-free practice that makes memory visible.*

1	**Make Memory Visible**	Finding a hidden object, noticing what changed, copying an action, sequencing a story, and recalling the day give families practical ways to exercise attention and recall without a screen or worksheet.
2	**Practice, Not Promises**	Play can support development, but it is not a diagnosis or treatment.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If memory difficulties interfere with daily life, learning, or communication, or if a child loses a previously learned skill, speak with a qualified health or education professional.

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