

A Lost Secret: How To Get Kids To Pay Attention

July 20, 2018

Fifteen years ago, psychologists Barbara Rogoff and Maricela Correa-Chavez ran a simple experiment. They wanted to see how well kids pay attention — even if they don't have to.

They would bring two kids, between the ages 5 to 11, into a room and have them sit at two tables.

Then they had a research assistant teach one of the kids how to assemble a toy.

The other kid was told to wait. Rogoff says they would tell the second child, “You can sit over here, and in a few minutes you'll have a turn to make this origami jumping mouse,” — a different task altogether.

Rogoff and Correa-Chavez wanted to see what the waiting child did. Would she pay attention to the research assistant. Or did she goof off?