

IDEAS TO IMPROVE ATTENTION AND LISTENING

Attention and Listening are foundation skills important to Speech and Language Development. In order to attend to one thing children must block out other distractions, such as noises, visual information and other events in their environment. Children need to be able to listen effectively to understand language.

3 steps to attending well: Sitting, Looking and Listening

Good sitting: Children find it easier to listen when they are sitting comfortably in a position where they can see the speaker's face.

If children find this difficult and are fidgeting it may be necessary to position them in a different way e.g. in a chair, cross legged, or leaning against something. Try sitting them closer to the speaker or on a special 'sitting spot'.

Let children know when they are doing this well by saying 'good sitting!' with a big thumbs up! This verbal reward may motivate them to continue to sit well.

Good looking: Young children need to be looking at a speaker in order to listen to them well. Sit where the child can see your face.

Minimise distractions and then work on gaining eye contact. Use motivating activities such as singing and bubbles to develop eye contact by leaving pauses in the activity, and continuing when the child gives eye contact. You can even let them know they are doing well by saying 'good looking!'. Eye contact is an important interaction skill.

Good Listening: Taking turns encourages good listening. Play games such as encouraging a children to copy the pattern of clapping or beats on a drum. Say "Good listening!" when the child copies your beats. Remember you may have to wait longer than you expect for young children to respond. Other listening games could include finding objects - pack a bag for Teddy to take on a day out and asking your child to fetch the items that Teddy may need.



Supporting Attention and Listening - Top 10 Tips!

Use the following strategies to help children develop their skills in this area. They are particularly useful for younger children and those who may have delayed speech and language development.

Minimise Distractions from the area where you want children to listen.

Reduce Group Size – begin developing listening in a 1:1 interaction, and slowly increase group size as skills develop.

Keep Language Simple and “chunk” longer sentences into a series of shorter ones.

Use exaggerated facial expression and gesture as this will help children to listen and understand.

Use visual cues such as pictures and props alongside spoken language.

Encourage children to join in with gestures, props and movement to help maintain their attention for longer.

Repeat, repeat, repeat – children enjoy repetition and may attend longer to activities they recognise the routine of.

Position the child who finds it hard to listen opposite and close to you so that the child will gain maximum benefit from visual and non-verbal clues.

Provide fiddle objects to those who find it hard to listen - something small to hold which will decrease the need to find something to touch and fiddle with.

Encourage turn taking - Increasing a child’s ability to take turns at a simple level e.g. taking turns to put bricks on a tower, will have a positive impact on their ability to listen and attend.