

IDEAS TO IMPROVE ATTENTION AND LISTENING

What is it?

Listening is an important skill necessary to assist with language development and communication. The ability to attend involves concentration on one sound i.e. a person's voice and filtering out competing distractions such as background noise, visual stimulation and things to touch or feel. Listening is an active process of interpreting the information we have heard.



How do children learn to listen?

- **Good sitting:** Children need to sit in a comfortable position with hands in their lap and where they can easily see the speaker's face. Not all children find it easy to sit cross legged on the floor and this may result in a lot of shuffling around and fidgeting, therefore it may be necessary to position a child with his/her back leaning against something in order to feel comfortable. Verbally reward good sitting by putting thumbs up and say "good sitting!"



- **Good looking (looking at the speaker):** Minimise distractions and then work on gaining eye contact. Some games such as stacking beakers or posting items in a box can be used to gain eye contact. For example, take turns stacking beakers and before putting one on the pile, wait for the child to give eye contact and then put the beaker on the pile saying "good looking!" Taking turns is an essential skill required to develop basic communication skills.
- **Good Listening:** Taking turns encourages good listening. Pass a ball or car between you, say "ready, steady (pause) go" and encourage the child to look at you before passing the toy.

Encourage a child to copy the pattern of beats on a drum (a plastic bowl and wooden spoon will do). Say "Good listening!" when the child copies your beats. Remember to wait a minimum of 10 seconds before expecting a response.

Pack a bag for Teddy to take on a day out and ask your child to fetch the items that Teddy may need.

TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING LISTENING AND ATTENTION SKILLS

The following strategies can be used to support the development of listening and attention skills in all children. They are particularly useful with younger children and for those with delayed speech and poor listening and attention skills.

Minimise Distractions- Attention involves the ability to filter out distractions. It helps if you remove any distractions such as toys, items to fiddle with, displays, from the area where you want children to listen.

Reduce Group Size - Children first learn to listen in a 1 - 1 situation and then in groups of gradually increasing size. Reducing group size will have a positive impact on listening and attention skills.

Keep Language Simple - We can encourage listening and attention by simplifying what we say and "chunking" longer sentences into a series of shorter ones.

Maximise non-verbal communication - Use exaggerated facial expression and gesture as we talk as this will help children to listen and understand.

Use visual cues - Using pictures and props alongside spoken language supports listening and attention and reinforces the spoken word.

Encourage participation - Listening is usually viewed as a passive activity but encouraging children to join in with gestures, props and movement will help their listening and maintain their attention for longer.

Repeat, repeat, repeat - Young children thrive on repetition, therefore repetition of stories, rhymes and activities is even more beneficial for children with delayed listening and attention.

Position of child - Sit 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.

Fiddle object - Give the child who finds it hard to listen something small to hold which will help the child to listen and decrease the need to find something to touch and fiddle with.

Encourage turn taking - Most children who find it difficult to attention and listening will also have difficulty taking turns. 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.