

Attention & Listening

What does 'Attention and Listening' mean?

Attention and listening skills are the foundation stones of language and learning. They are different from just hearing sounds. They are *active* processes. Paying attention involves concentrating on an activity and integrating information from different sources (i.e. what you see and what you hear). At the same time you have to be able to ignore any irrelevant information (i.e. not become distracted). For example, when talking to someone in a crowded room you concentrate on what one person is saying and ignore the conversation and noise from the rest of the room.

Strategies to develop attention & listening skills

How to establish the child's attention?

- Say the child's name
- Use gesture to encourage the child to look at you
- Establish eye contact with the child

How do I maintain the child's attention?

- Keep tasks short and simple so you can positively reinforce a child for completing an activity
- Use visual objects / pictures to help maintain the child's attention to *what* you are talking about
- Keep refocusing the child

How do I refocus the child's attention?

- Use verbal prompts to remind the child to "*look, listen*"
- Use verbal prompts to refocus the child to *what* you are talking about e.g. "*we're not talking about that now we're talking about things to eat*"
- Use gestures to prompt the child to look and listen
- Use positive reinforcement when the child is attending e.g. "*good listening, good looking*" etc
- Use visual reinforcement to support attention and listening skills with posters, stamp charts etc.

General Strategies:

- Positioning & Seating: Think carefully about where the child is seated in class. Which children will be seated next to him/her? Try to keep the child at the front of the class. Avoid letting the children choose where they sit. Have a fixed seat.
- Environment: Try to reduce distractions in the room e.g. windows facing the playground may need to be closed. Is the work area too congested? Are there too many distractions in the room e.g. wall displays, wall hangings.
- Materials: Try to use materials of interest to the child e.g. if using pictures/books - large coloured ones are better than small line drawings. Try incorporating the child's interests into your planning.
- Eye contact: Ensure you have eye contact with the child and his/her attention before giving spoken instructions.
- Child's name: Use the child's name to get his/her attention before giving instructions.
- Activity: Make sure the activities are at the appropriate level for the child's ability.

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- Time: Give the child time to respond.
- Praise: If they manage to stay on task during the activity let them know. 'You did really good listening!'
- Visual Aids: Use visual aids such as visual timetables, so they know how many activities they have to do *and* how long they need to concentrate for.
- Reward: Reinforce with a reward chart/stickers or maybe an extra activity/5 minutes in golden time.

Activities to develop attention & listening skills

BASIC:

- **Touch your nose:** Call out simple instructions for the group to follow. When the children are familiar with this game, give them turns at being "teacher".
- **Stop/go games:** Set up a simple activity for the child to do e.g. knocking over a tower, throwing a beanbag into a box, jumping into a hoop, knocking over skittles, playing a musical instrument. The child has to wait for the adult to say "ready steady go". When the children are familiar with this game, give them turns at being "teacher".
- **Sound location:** Children have to close their eyes and the adult has to hide a wind up toy under something. The children have to guess where the noise is coming from. You could hide a noisy object e.g. loud ticking clock, musical box in the room for the child to find by listening (not looking).
- **Listening to animal noises:** Have a selection of animal pictures/toys on the floor. Adult makes an animal sound and the child has to find the corresponding picture/toy. This can also be played with other pictures/ objects e.g. car/telephone/baby/fire engine/clock.
- **Musical statues/bumps:** This can be done with one child at a time to make sure they are really listening and not just copying. The child moves around the room when they hears a continuous shaker but must stop when they hear a drum beat.
- **Follow the leader:** The adult carries out different actions and the children have to copy them. When the children are familiar with this game, give them turns at being "teacher".
- **Look at me:** Adult shuts eyes and puts head down, then counts out loud to three and then looks at one child. When eye contact is made child says "It's me". The child can get a reward e.g. a sticker/sits on a special chair. When the children are familiar with this game, give them turns at being "teacher".

INTERMEDIATE:

- **Sound Lotto:** Child matches sounds heard on a tape to picture e.g. animal sounds, sounds in the home/school. (From Early Learning Centre or make your own!).
- **Remembering a sequence of sounds:** 2 sets of musical instruments, one set in front of the child and one behind the adults back. The adult plays one of the hidden instruments and the child has to play the corresponding one i.e. adult plays the shaker, the child has to play the shaker. When the child is easily able to copy one instrument then introduce two sounds.

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- **Copying rhythms:** Clap out a rhythm for the child to copy e.g. clap twice.
- **Recognising other children's voices:** One child (e.g. Marek) has their eyes closed and sits with their back to the others. The adult points to another child who says "Hello Marek" and Marek has to guess who said it.
- **Personalising stories:** Adult tells a story using names of children from the class. Each child has to put up their hand when they hear their name.
- **Animal stories:** Tell a story with animals in it - when the children hear an animal referred to they have to make the appropriate animal sound.

HIGHER:

- **Who's got....:** Children put their hand up/stand up if they have got.....a brother;are wearing trainers/a skirt/ a jumper;have brown hair;if you are wearing something red.
- **Linking actions to sounds:** a) Adult plays an instrument slowly and the children have to walk slowly. b) Adult plays one instrument (e.g. a shaker) and the children have to jump, then they play another instrument (e.g. a drum) and the children have to go to sleep.
- **Fruit salad:** Label the children as fruit. Make sure all of the children are sitting on chairs. Call out the name of one of the fruits and these children have to change seats. If you call fruit salad, all the children have to change seats. The children may need stickers to help them remember.
- **Kim's game:** Put three objects/pictures on the floor cover them up then remove one. Ask the child to guess which one has gone.
- **Chinese Whispers:** Start with a small phrases and then build up the sentence length.
- **Memory Games:** "I went on holiday and I took _____", "I went to the zoo and I saw _____". These games can be played with a number of children. Each child remembers items already said and adds one of her/his own.
- **Taped instructions:** Read some instructions on a tape recorder e.g. "Go and get a ruler, paintbrush and take off your shoe". The child has to follow the instructions. Involve the whole class in this.
- **Bean Game - caller shouts "long bean, broad bean, baked bean, jelly bean"** The child assumes the following positions: long bean - stand up with hands in the air, broad bean - stand up with hands stretched out to the side, baked bean - crouch down, making oneself as small as possible, jelly bean - shake everything.

