

Attention and Listening Skills

Many children with a speech and language difficulty also have attention and listening difficulties. Good attention and listening skills are important for:

- Understanding language
- Making friends and playing with other children
- Learning how to make different speech sounds
- Learning words and how to put them into sentences.

It may help your child's speech and language development by working on improving their attention and listening skills.

Tips

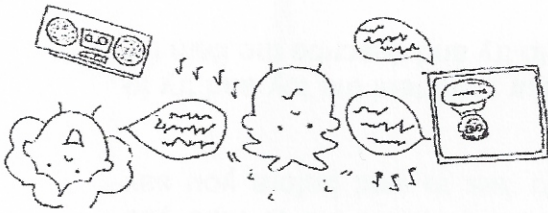
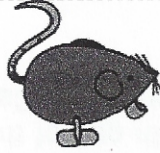
- **Use your child's name first** to get their attention. Prompt them to listen by using a gesture such as putting your hand to your ear. Try using an interesting tone of voice and use lots of gesture and facial expressions. Use short phrases and keep your language simple.

- **Reduce background noise**, as this makes it more difficult for your child to pick out your speech from all the other sounds around. So switch off the telly and the radio! Only turn them on for specific programmes, and watch them together with your child.

- **Play in a quiet place** without brothers and sisters at first to reduce distractions.

- **Keep activities within your child's attention span**, so that you can finish a game before you both get impatient and cross, and then feel the success of having seen an activity through to the end. **Gradually increase the length of the games** to increase their attention span. Try telling your child "last one" or "one more" to keep them going a little longer. Whatever games you play should be very interesting and motivating for your child, and appropriate for their age. Sit face to face with your child.

- **Play 'Ready Steady Go!'**. Pause before 'Go' and gradually increase the length of the pause. Try to incorporate a reward into the activity itself, for example, knocking over the tower of bricks, finding the hidden toy or blowing bubbles. Ask your child to wait for 'Go' before completing the activity. These experiences encourage attention and are much more rewarding than sweets. Give your child lots of praise by saying "good listening".



Activities for improving attention and listening

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- **Nursery Rhymes:** Sing action rhymes such as *Row Your Boat*, *Twinkle Twinkle and Insy Winsy Spider*. Only sing when your child is listening. Wait for them to look at you before starting to sing again.

- **Familiar stories:** Tell a familiar story and leave gaps for your child to fill in words they know. This works well with repetitive stories such as *Three Little Pigs*.

- **Look at books:** choose interactive books such as 'lift the flap' books, feely books, pop-up books or musical books.

- **Listen to every day sounds:** talk about noises that you can hear around you such as birds, cars, rain, cats etc. Try and find what is making the noise. For example, go to the window to look at the rain.

- **Who can you hear?:** Place a small number of animal toys or pictures in front of your child. Make the noise of one of the animals and say "which one can you hear?". Take turns to make the animal sounds. You could also try recording familiar people (Mum, Dad, grandparents, brothers, sisters, friends etc). Put out photos of these people then play the voices and ask your child to match the voice to the photo.

- **Peek-a-boo:** Use your hands, cushions, blankets, towels, furniture etc to hide your face. Gradually increase the length of time your child has to wait before you say "Peek-a-boo".

- **Guess the Toy:** Hide toys in a box or feely bag. Let your child feel the toy and try to identify it without looking at it. You could ask your child to try and describe the item for you to guess what it is.

- **Hide and Seek:** Hide a toy somewhere in the room and give your child instructions on where to find it. For example, "go to the sofa" then "look underneath". Gradually increase the length of instruction they must follow. Alternatively, hide an object that makes a noise, such as a clock or a radio, and encourage your child to find it.

- **Stop and Go games:** Play games such as musical chairs or musical bumps where they can only move if the music is playing.

- **Kim's Game:** Put a few items on a tray. Cover the tray and remove an item then ask your child which item is gone.

- **Make mistakes:** Make mistakes while reading a story or playing games by getting the words wrong, e.g. "Insy Winsy Elephant" and calling Mum or Dad by the wrong name. Can your child spot the mistakes?

- **Copy Me:** Clap a rhythm and encourage your child to copy you. Gradually increase the number of claps. You could also use actions that your child has to copy in the right order. Collect pairs of objects that make a noise (such as two bunches of keys, two empty crisp packets, and 2 cups with a spoon in). Give one set to your child and keep one yourself. Make a sound with one of the objects and ask your child to copy you. Then, hide your objects under the table. Can they copy you from just listening to the sounds?