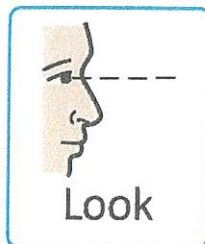




The Importance of Listening and Attention

Listening and attention are vital skills in the development of language and help children to interact successfully with others. Listening and attention skills develop gradually over time from the moment your child is born. It is essential that children develop a firm foundation in the early skill of listening so that they can successfully develop later skills. Encouraging your child to listen and pay attention will help them to focus and become better communicators.

To be a 'good listeners' children need to:



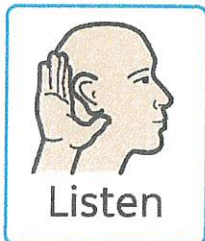
Look



**Keep
fairly still**

1. Look at the person talking

2. Keep fairly still



Listen



Be quiet

3. Listen to all the words

4. Be quiet

Click on this link for a copy of these [Listening Cue Cards](#)

Listening and Attention difficulties

Children with listening and attention difficulties may present with the following:

- Appear to ignore you
- Cannot sit still
- Talk when they should be listening
- Easily distracted
- Can only focus on one thing
- Do not settle and flit from one activity to another
- Cannot tell you what you have been talking about
- Can have difficulty in following instruction



Listening and Attention: What to Expect and When

Listening and attention skills develop typically in six stages.

AGE RANGE	HOW DOES THIS PRESENT?	HOW CAN YOU HELP?
0-1 years	Fleeting Attention: Very distractible and attention can be fleeting.	Use the child's interests, look for what motivates them to gain attention.
1-2 years	Rigid attention: Can concentrate on a task of their choosing but will ignore everything else. Will often ignore adult direction. Establishing eye contact.	Give them time to complete their choice of activity before directing them. Gain their attention by calling their name or a physical prompt. Play copying or Peek a Boo games
2-3 years	Single channelled attention: A child can follow an adult when they stop an activity and look at the adult. May need support to do this.	Call their name and wait for them to look before speaking. Praise them for looking Now and Next boards can help them to shift their focus.
3-4 years	Single-channelled-focusing attention: Begin to control their own focus of attention. Can shift their attention more easily from task to speaker and back, requiring less adult support.	Let your child know when it's time to listen. Call their name and wait for them to look. Use Listening Cue Cards Try to concentrate on an activity of their choosing for 15 minutes.
4-5 years	Two channelled attention: This stage is expected by the time a child starts school. Concentration span can be short, but they can now perform an activity whilst listening without needing to stop.	Use visual support to encourage good listening skills. Praise them for good listening Use Listening Cue Cards and a reward charts
5-6 years	Integrated attention: Attention skills are now established and flexible. Can listen and work at the same time for lengthy periods and shut out unwanted/irrelevant information.	Continue to reinforce good listening skills using visual and verbal support. Give explicit praise for good listening behaviours.



Strategies to support Listening and Attention

Have some time each day when you **reduce distractions** such as the TV, music and any background noise so your child can hear just your voice.

Watch the child to **see what interests them** and **follow their lead**. Join in with what they are doing.

Encourage them to look towards you when you are talking to them. Call their name and wait for them to look.

For small children, get down to their level.

Slow down your rate of speech and use pauses. Pausing during play can build in an element of anticipation. For example, pausing before 'go' in ['ready, steady, go' games](#), and waiting for the child to indicate that they want the next step to happen.

Allow time for your child to process your instructions/questions before asking another question.

Keep activities short and stop if your child loses interest.

If a child is struggling to maintain attention, [now and next boards](#) can be used to encourage children to shift focus.

Try to make sure that your child finishes an activity to experience success, rather than giving up or running out of time. Setting up 'Start and finish' boxes can help with this.

Set time limits for your child to complete a task (make these achievable to start with). Use a sand timer or digital timer as a visual prompt.

Keep your play exciting by using your tone of voice and facial expression

Model the behaviour you want to see. Make sure you look at them when they are talking, wait for them to finish before you talk.

Develop clear turn-taking in conversation e.g. 'Now it's your turn to talk, my turn to listen' Use [turn-talking cue cards](#) as a visual reminder.

Talk about why it is important to listen (e.g. to know what to do, to find out interesting things) and use the [listening cue cards](#) to reinforce what your child needs to do to listen really well.

Praise them when they show good listening and tell them what you are happy about, so they know what to do more of! e.g. "You showed that you were **really looking at me** while I was talking" Use [a reward chart](#) to reinforce this.