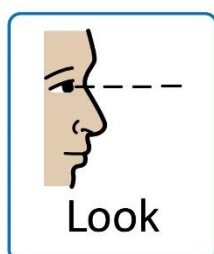




## **The Importance of Listening and Attention**

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:



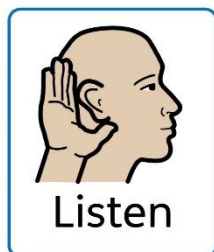
**Look**



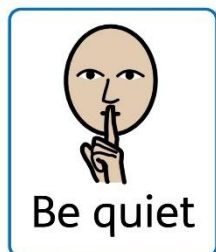
**Keep  
fairly still**

**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	<b>Fleeting Attention:</b> Very distractible and attention can be fleeting.	Use the child's interests, look for what motivates them to gain attention.
1-2 years	<b>Rigid attention:</b> 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	<b>Single channelled attention:</b> 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 <a href="#">Now and Next boards</a> can help them to shift their focus.
3-4 years	<b>Single-channelled-focusing attention:</b> 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 <a href="#">Listening Cue Cards</a> Try to concentrate on an activity of their choosing for 15 minutes.
4-5 years	<b>Two channelled attention:</b> 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 <a href="#">Listening Cue Cards</a> and a <a href="#">reward charts</a>
5-6 years	<b>Integrated attention:</b> 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.



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## Activities to Encourage Listening and Attention at Home

### For Younger Children.....

**Sing nursery rhymes:** Such as 'Incey wincey spider' or 'Round and round the garden' Pause and wait for your child to signal they want another turn e.g. by looking up or saying 'more' or 'again'.

**Share Interactive books:** Books with flaps, pop up books and those with textures can be fun to explore together to develop shared attention.

**Turn-taking games:** Many young children find it difficult to learn to wait, share and accept the rules of turn-taking and sharing. Take turns to play games such as posting, fishing, lotto, feely bag, passing a clap. Please refer to the following link for further [games for turn-taking](#).

**Ready Steady Go!** Try some simple '[Ready Steady Go!](#)' games using cause and effect toys e.g. push and go cars or pop up toys, these are great to encourage attention. Pause before saying 'go' in order to increase the amount of time your child holds their attention.

**Looking games:** Eye contact is an important skill and shows people that you are listening and can be used to gain someone's attention. You can play a range of 'people games' (tickle games, singing and rhyme) and encourage your child to look at you before giving them a turn. Please follow the link for further [looking games](#).

**Listening Lotto:** Encourage your child to match the animal or environmental sound to the picture. You can make the sound or find sound recordings on the internet. Using pictures, encourage your child to put a counter on the picture they heard. Follow the [Listening Lotto](#) link for pictures you could use.

**What's that noise?** Use something which makes a noise e.g. a ticking clock, musical box or your phone. Hide the object in the room and encourage your child to listen for the noise and find the object.

**Listening walk:** Go for a listening walk. Draw your child's attention to sounds you hear e.g. lorries, aeroplanes, road works, barking dogs and singing birds. Use the attached [Listening walk tick chart](#) to use on your walk.

**Stop and Go games:** Play musical chairs and musical bumps. Encourage your child to listen out for when the music starts/stops.



## Activities to Encourage Listening and Attention at Home

### For older children.....

**Silly Stories:** Read a well-known story to your child, make deliberate mistakes e.g. change the name of a character or place. Can your child spot the mistakes?

**Simon says:** Use this game to encourage waiting. Get your child to wait until you say the action i.e. "Simon says...(pause) ....put your hands on your head". You could make it harder by extending the pause. To encourage listening skills you can also use this game to encourage your child to follow a longer instruction e.g. 'Simon says....touch your nose and turn around'

**Stop, wait, go!** When you say 'green' your child must run around, when you say 'amber' your child must sit down and when you say 'red' your child has to stand still and stop. Turn this game into a looking game and instead of talking use the [Stop, Wait Go! visual prompts](#). Your child will need to look at which symbol you are holding to know what to do.

**Shopping List:** This is a listening and remembering game. You say "I went to the shops and I bought...Take turns thinking of something you can buy in the supermarket. Try and remember what the last person said. E.g. Player 1: "I went to the shops and I bought a banana' Player 2: "I went to the shops and I bought a banana and an apple" See how many you can remember between you.

**[Lotto, Snap or memory pairs games:](#)** These are great motivational turn-taking games (see link for pictures). Gradually increase the time you spend on these games.

**News Time:** This game encourages turn-taking and waiting to speak. Use a hairbrush or a specific object that acts as a 'microphone'. This is passed around the family. The person holding the 'microphone' is the only one allowed to speak everyone else must be quiet and listen.

