

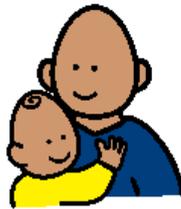
The Importance of Developing Attention and Listening

Why is attention important?

Children have to learn to focus their attention on to different things. This usually starts with attending to people, then to objects, then being able to share their attention between people and objects.

Children need to develop their attention skills before they learn to understand words and learn to talk.

Children need to be able to attend and concentrate so that they can learn new skills, including how to communicate.



Why is listening important?

Children may hear what you say but not listen to what you say. Listening to language involves hearing the words, attending to them and thinking about them.

Children need to be able to listen to and recognise the sounds that make up words and sentences so that they can learn to understand and use words and sentences themselves.

The different sounds we use in our speech can sound very similar to one another when children are learning language.

Children often need to practise listening to a range of different sounds to develop this skill.



Strategies to develop Attention

What helps?

- Reduce distractions. This might include removing other toys.
- Turn the TV or background music off.
- Choose a time of day when you and the child are fresh and in a good frame of mind.
- Watch the child to see what interests them and follow their lead. Join in with what they are doing.
- “People games” (tickles, singing, rhymes etc) are often the best type of activity to start with to get a child’s attention.
- If using a toy, play with one toy at a time in many different ways to keep the child’s interest. Don’t be concerned about using the toy in a different way from usual. Using the toy in an unusual way might just be the thing to get the child’s attention.
- Keep activities short and stop when the child loses interest.
- Keep your play exciting by using your tone of voice and facial expression.
- Using pauses 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.
- Follow the child’s lead throughout the play. Play with what interests them.
- Try to get the child to the end of an activity even if it only lasts a few seconds. For games with a definite end point encourage the child to complete the final step, even if you do the rest of it, for example, you do most of a jigsaw and let them put the last piece in.

