

Characteristics of Attention and Listening Difficulties

Children with attention and listening difficulties may have some of the following characteristics:

- Appear to ignore you
- Cannot sit still
- Talk when should be listening
- Cannot tell you what you have been talking about
- Do not appear to know what to do and can have difficulty following instructions
- Can only concentrate on one thing
- Are easily distracted
- Do not settle with one activity, but tend to flit from task to task



Typical Developmental Stages of Attention Skills:

The six stages of attention and listening development are:

Development of Attention Skills	Practical Ways to Help
STAGE ONE: Very distractible, attention is focused on whatever is their current interest and will be quickly shifted to any new stimulus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the child's interests and incorporate these into the different areas of play eg, Peppa Pig figures in the water tray.
STAGE TWO: Can concentrate on a task of their own choosing. Children do not have the ability to focus on more than one task. It is difficult for an adult to direct the child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the child time to complete an activity of their own choosing • You will need to use the child's name and/or a physical prompt such as touching their hand to gain their attention.
STAGE THREE: Attention is still single channelled but the child is now able to shift their attention away from the current task and then go back to the original activity with adult support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say the child's name before giving any instructions or expecting a response.



<p>STAGE FOUR: Start to be able to control their own focus of attention. Children are now able to shift their attention to and from tasks more easily and require less adult support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the child know when it's time to listen. • Use visual prompts such as hands in the air or clapping to gain whole group attention.
<p>STAGE FIVE: The child is usually entering school at this stage. They can now perform an activity whilst listening to the teacher giving instructions. This is called dual channelled attention. Concentration span can still be quite short, however, children can cope with group situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an introductory phrase, gesture or non-verbal prompt. • Give information in a clear sequence. • Encourage active listening.
<p>STAGE SIX: Attention skills are now flexible and sustained for lengthy periods. The child can integrate visual and auditory information with ease.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage active questioning and processing of information.

Adapted from: Cooper, J., Moodley, M. and Reynell, J. (1978) Helping Language Development: A Developmental Programme for Children with Early Learning Handicaps. London: Edward Arnold

