



Helping your school age child to listen



Children gradually learn how to listen.

A child who finds it difficult to listen, may find it difficult to:

- Pay attention when you talk
- Remember what you have said
- Listen to you explaining something or to a story
- Follow instructions
- Wait for a turn in a conversation or a game.

Listening involves paying attention to sounds. However, it is not just one skill and involves:

- ✓ looking at who is talking
- ✓ being still and staying quiet without fidgeting
- ✓ listening to all the words

Good listening is part of what is needed to understand what someone is saying and helps a child to join in conversations and become a good learner.

Just telling a child to listen may not help! If you are concerned about your child's listening, seek advice from your GP and/or a qualified speech and language therapist as appropriate.

Read this leaflet for general ideas of how you can help your child to listen.



Learning to listen and pay attention develops in stages.

In the early stages...children become absorbed in their own choice of activity and block out other sounds so they can concentrate. They appear to be ignoring you!

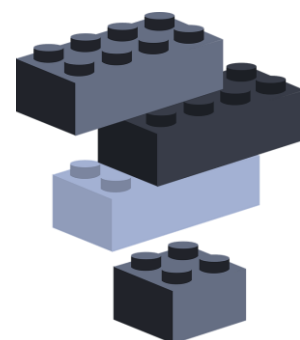
What you can do: Give your child time to complete an activity. You may need to touch his/her arm gently to gain their attention.

Later on... a child can change their focus to concentrate on something else but needs your help to stop what they are doing and transfer their focus to you.

What you can do: Call your child's name first and say "Look at me" or wait for them to look at you before speaking.

Eventually... a child learns to listen and do. They can carry on doing one thing but can listen and respond to something different at the same time. For example, play with Lego and talk about going to a friend's house. Gradually your child will gain more independent control of their listening and concentration.

What you can do: While this skill is developing, you may still need to call your child's name to help them transfer their focus.



Ten top listening tips

1. Make listening easier by turning off background noise. For example, turn off the TV or radio.
2. Try to model good listening! Turn to them and look at them. Show your child that they have your full attention.
3. When you talk, help your child to focus by using their name and encourage them to look at you and keep still before you speak.
"Jack...look at me...where are your shoes?"
"It's story time -keep still so you can do good listening".
4. Use simple words and shorter sentences that your child can understand and remember.
5. Slow your own speech slightly.
6. Reduce the number of questions that you ask. This helps you to share the talking.
7. Pause to allow plenty of time for your child to take in and think about what you have said.
8. It may be helpful to repeat what you say to give your child another chance to take in your words.
9. Check your child has understood by observing what they do, sometimes children may listen carefully but still find it hard to understand the message.
10. Praise good listening even if this was for a short time. "Well done you kept really quiet and that helped you to do good listening".

Activities to encourage listening & concentrating

If you can, arrange a regular time when you can have a few minutes together to talk, do an activity or play a game. Choose a time when your child isn't tired or hungry. Keep it short and fun.

Go on a listening walk. Go outside and talk about what you can both hear eg: aeroplane, car, dog barking, bird singing, baby crying. Later, draw a picture together of what you heard.

Sing a familiar song or a funny rhyme together. Children love the repetition of a familiar rhyme or song. Leave out a key word or line in the song and see if your child can fill in the blanks!

Make something together. Follow your child's interests and choose something that involves a few steps in a sequence.

For example: a paper aeroplane, a loom band, chocolate rice crispy cakes, a Lego monster, a daisy chain.

Play a taking turns game. For example, Pop up Pirate, skittles, Jenga, throwing and catching a beanbag/ball.

Tip: Gradually increase the time that you spend playing by a minute or two – a kitchen timer can be helpful with this.

Play I spy with my little eye. Use describing clues eg: 'I spy with my little eye something with four legs that barks.'

Tip: If you play this with more than one child use a talking stick (or another object) for taking turns and to reduce shouting out if one child needs longer to think.

Play describing words charades. Your child thinks of an action, for example swimming, adds a describing word, for example slowly and acts it out for you to guess.

Share jokes and funny stories. This can be from your day or from a favourite book or a TV programme.

