

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Goal: Listening Skills

To develop the ability to listen and understand information.

Listening skills affect a child's ability to learn, remember information and to cope in everyday situations.

DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS

The following strategies will help you to develop your child's listening skills.

1. Show your child how to be a good listener by being a good listener yourself. Children often copy the behaviour they see adults using. This means when he/she is telling you something which is important to him/her take the time to stop what you are doing, get down to his/her level, give good eye contact, pay attention and ask questions to encourage him/her to expand on what he/she is telling you. You may not always have time to do this, explain to your child why you cannot listen.
2. Consider the effect of surroundings on your child's ability to listen. For example: Is the television on? Is there a lot of background noise? Are other people talking? Are there other activities going on at the same time? Are there lots of distractions? It is important that he/she listens carefully to what you are saying. At first try going to a quiet non-distracting place where you can talk and he/she can listen effectively.
3. Encourage your child to look at you as he/she listens. This will help to focus his/her attention.
4. Adjust your speech to your child's level of understanding. You can simplify instructions by either reducing the number of things required to remember or by reducing the level of complexity for example, "Go and get your bag, your book and your shoe" could become "Get your bag. Good. Now get your book and your shoe". An instruction such "Put the small box below the large one" can be made easier to understand buy using gestures as you speak.
5. After giving your child an instruction, check that he/she understand what is required by asking him/her questions or asking him/her to tell you what you said.
6. Teach your child strategies for helping remember things, for example by repeating the instruction, by taking notes or drawing pictures to remind him/her what he/she has to do (if he/she is old enough), by taking an object with him/her which will remind him/her of what he/she has to do, or by singing or humming an instruction in his/her head to a favourite tune, which sometimes helps children to remember things.
7. Try to develop a routine for giving instructions which include "Stop what you are doing", "Look at me", "Listen". Give the instruction once only, check understanding and then do the action.



The following activities will allow your child to practise listening to other people's speech.

1. **Give instructions to follow** around the room. This could mean collecting objects, carrying out simple tasks or giving items to other people.

2. **Barrier games.**

Place the barrier such as an open folder between two people on a table. Each person has an identical set of objects or pictures which the other cannot see. One person moves the objects and tells the other what they are doing. The second person follows the actions. When the barrier is removed the two sets should look the same. As you play this game, your child will have plenty of opportunity to practise good listening and the results of not listening carefully will be evident when the barrier is removed.

3. **Reading stories** to children and then asking them to tell it back or asking them questions about what happened in the story is a good way of practising good listening skills.

4. **Obstacle Course.**

Give your child instructions which involve moving around the room or around the yard. For example, "Run and touch the fence then walk around the sand pit, over the bench and back to me".

5. **Play Simple Simon.** As he/she develops the ability to play this game, try making the instructions slightly longer or more complex.



With all of these activities, adjust the level of instructions that your child must pay attention to according to his/her achievements. As he/she is able to manage simple short instructions, gradually make the instructions longer and more complex so as to continually challenge his/her ability to listen and remember.

LISTENING GAMES

1. Matching sounds to objects or pictures:

- (i) Have three or four pictures of familiar animals. Make an animal noise and get the children to identify the correct picture of the animal which would make the noise.
- (ii) Lay out several musical instruments and play one for the children to pick out. At first it may be necessary for them to watch you; later they can rely on auditory skills alone.
- (iii) Use familiar objects or toys that make a noise.

2. Make up a story with a child's name in it. Read it once and then repeat it explaining that he/she must put up their hand when the name is called. If this is done as a group, call the names of the more able children first, to act as models.
3. As above but when the children hear one of the boys' names all the boys stand up, and when they hear one of the girls' names all the girls stand up. Be sure to use the names of the children in the group. (This activity is only suitable for a small group).
4. Asking for objects: gradually increase the number of objects displayed and requested.
 - (i) Shopping bag: use a real net bag and ask a child to put a series of objects inside.
 - (ii) Suitcase: have a real case and real clothes doll sized ones, and ask a child to pack the suitcase.
 - (iii) Draw a washing-line. Ask children to 'hang up' a series of small pictures of clothes with Blu-Tak.
5. Following commands:
 - (i) Ask the children to touch two or three body parts.
 - (ii) Ask them to touch or give you two unrelated objects eg: table, chair.
 - (iii) Ask them to touch or give you two unrelated objects eg: shoe, book, which is slightly harder because they cannot guess the second object.
 - (iv) Give them simple actions to do to musical stimuli eg: when they hear the drum they must run to the door. This will need to be demonstrated.
6. In a group play 'Musical Chairs'. Each child sits down when the music stops. Real chairs are not necessary; the floor will do nicely!
7. 'Simple Simon Says', with and then without gesture.
8. Asking for objects or pictures; but introduce a fantasy element eg: 'pretend you are going to a desert island and you must take a box of matches, a torch and a swimming costume'. Encourage the child to collect these objects. (Further ideas include: holidays, space travel, mock battles, sports).
9. Read a story.



- (i) About a dog or a cat, and whenever the animal is mentioned your child must make the appropriate noise or mime the particular animal.
 - (ii) About a child's birthday and all the different presents he/she gets; as the child hears the presents mentioned he/she collects the appropriate picture. Afterwards read the story again and help him/her to check that he/she is right.
10. The children sit in a circle; they must call another child's name and throw a beanbag to him/her.
11. Auditory Discrimination activities:
- (i) Lay down a number of everyday objects eg: keys, bell, a spoon in a cup, and wind-up toy, and while he/she shuts his/her eyes, make the associated noise. He/She must correctly identify the object. Repeat this activity using plastic letters or letterland characters for school aged children.



FOLLOWING COMMANDS

The following activities will allow your child to practise understanding commands. Begin by asking your child to follow commands with only one part, then build up to two part commands and if he/she can manage well, introduce three part commands or longer.

1. Place a number of objects or pictures in front of your child and name them. Ask your child to point to the one you have said or to hand the one you have said to you. Activities such as form boards, lotto boards and books are useful for practising this task. If he/she does not select the correct item, take his/her hand and guide it to the correct item and then give him/her a reward for trying.
2. Practise carrying out a simple action, for example when playing Simon Says. For example you may say "clap" or "shut your eyes" or "stand up". You can practise things such as pointing to body parts for example "Show me your eyes, your nose, your ears". Praise your child for responding correctly to your commands.
3. You can practise activities involving moving around the room and completing particular tasks. For example, "get your book" or "find your pencil". This task is more difficult than the previous ones because of the time delay involved between moving about the room and the distractions which may occur as your child completes the task.
4. When reading stories to your child, you can look at the pictures and ask him/her to point to things seen.