

Early Interventions Speech, Language and Communication Listening and Attention



How can I help develop a child's listening and attention?

General strategies

- Make sure you understand the level of listening and attention development the child is at. (See development chart). You can then adapt the activity so that it is at the child's level and provide appropriate support. It is beneficial to work on an activity that is familiar and comfortable for the child at the same time as something that is new and challenging.
- Help children focus their listening and attention on you before you start to speak to them. This can be done by saying their name, touching their hand, asking them to look at you.
- Use a visual signal to get the child's attention and where possible, use objects, pictures and gestures to support what you say and maintain the child's attention.
- Use high-interest activities, e.g. bubbles.
- Ensure the environment is as quiet as possible and reduce any background noise and distractions.
- Ensure you are face to face with the child.
- Keep groups small.
- We tend to assume that the child is attending to what we want but this is not always the case. For example, when looking at a book with a child, you could be talking about the elephant on the page, whilst the child is looking at the mouse. Try to observe the child and talk about what they are interested in.
- Carry out practical activities as much as possible. Use real objects to demonstrate or explain, where that is not possible use photos or pictures.
- Keep your sentences short and simple (appropriate to child's level of development).
- Use different intonations and facial expressions to support attention.
- Promote active listening by teaching the rules of good listening such as:
 - Look at the person talking
 - Good sitting (as appropriate to development)
 - Think about the words
 - Take turns
- Start by keeping activities/tasks short and gradually increase the length of the task when the child is ready.

Ideas and strategies to help gain a child's attention and listening



Gain eye contact with the child before giving them an instruction



Get down to the child's level



Call their name first

Use short sentences and break down instructions into smaller parts

'Put an apron on'.....'Get some paper' 'find a paintbrush'



Use tone of voice, gestures, objects or symbols as clues to gain attention



Talk about what the child is doing



Keep group sizes small



Try to reduce distractions and background noise, find a quiet place where possible.

Be repetitive

'Ball!'.....'ball'.....'the ball's bouncing'.....'ball's gone!'



Only introduce a few toys at once