

Developing early attention and listening Skills

These are activities that help build concentration and increase attention span. They help a child to stay on task and to remain focused. These activities are also aimed at developing auditory memory. These are listening activities, which all children enjoy. Many of these activities may already be part of your regular routine.

Wake up games using voice

Choose a quiet place. Remove any distracters.

1. Choose a teddy
2. Pretend Teddy has gone to sleep.
3. Call “Wake up”!
4. Encourage your child to listen for “wake –up “ and to make Teddy jump!

Move to the Sound

Use a drum or other noisemaker. Pots or pans or an old biscuit box will do!

1. Encourage your child to listen. Point to your ear. Let him/her know what you mean.
2. Put some small mats on the floor in a line.
3. Let your child beat the drum or have the noisemaker. You jump from mat to mat as your child makes the sound.
4. Now changeover. Encourage your child to jump as you beat the drum.

Change or vary this activity to keep your child’s interest. You can use different sound makers.

Hide behind the chair. When your child beats the drum, jump up and say “Boo”. Change over and let your child hide as *you* beat the drum.

You can extend this game when your child has become a better listener.

E.g. one sound.....one jump
 two sounds.....lie down on the floor.

The Go Game

This works well with other children or with just you and your child. When another child is involved, the hearing impaired child may look to the other children for cues. Encourage listening.

Choose a quiet place. Remove any distractors. You can choose to work on the floor or you may prefer to choose a table. You can choose from a variety of toys e.g. cars/balls.

1. Tell your child he/she has to listen for “**Go**” before he can push the car or roll the ball across the floor or on the table.
2. Say, “**Go**” and show him how to play.
3. Let your child say, “**Go**” to start.

Variations

- Have short races – walking or running – but you must wait for the word GO.
- Playing with Lego – wait for **Go** – building a tower!
- Using a shape sorter – inserting a shape only when you hear **Go**!

Jack in the Box

Sit with your child in a quiet place. Remove any distractors.

Use a puppet and a box.

- Hold the puppet in the box.
- Say “hello” and the puppet comes out.
- Say “bye bye” and the puppet goes back in the box.

Encourage your child to hold the puppet and listen for the words.

Development

Use other toys – teddy jump/teddy walk/dolly sit.

Hide and Seek

You can use a playhouse for this game and you can involve other children. If you do not have a playhouse be creative. Put a blanket over 2 chairs.

1. Encourage your child to hide.
2. Call his/her name and encourage him to come out. (Jump out!)
3. Take turns – encourage your child to vocalize as you jump out!

Listening for Animal Sounds

Find a quiet place and remove all distracters.

You will need

- an empty container
- small toy animals (cow, sheep, snake, baby doll, cot).

Sit opposite your child.

1. Start with only one toy e.g. "Moo" and move the cow.
2. Encourage your child to produce a sound as you move the cow.
3. Say "Moo" and encourage your child to put the cow in the container.
4. Now introduce another animal and do the same again.

"Baa"	for a sheep
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"Eee"	for a mouse
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"Seee"	for a snake
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"Woof woof"	for a dog
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"Moo moo"	for a cow
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5. Now encourage your child to move the correct animal in response the sound.
6. Now encourage your child to put the correct animal in the container in response to the sound.

Development

Encourage babble and play with the animals. Let the animal fall off the table. Say the sound.

Encourage your child to imitate!

Find the Object

Find a quiet place and remove all distracters.

You will need

- A bag or a box
- A range of objects eg. a car, an apple, a ball (begin with just 2-3 objects and then build on this)

Sit opposite your child.

1. Let your child see each object and handle it
2. Place the objects into the box/bag
3. Get your child to give you at least one item on request eg. "give me the ball".
4. You can vary the contents, replacing one with another object that may be interesting to your child.

Use of Pictures and objects to reinforce listening skills

Use pictures or photographs to reinforce listening skills and vocabulary. Have a range of pictures of objects eg. a banana and an apple. Begin with just two pictures and turn them over on the table. Ask your child to give you the banana. Later you can add another one e.g. a car. Make this into a game and clap when the child gets it right!

When your child gets the activity right let him/her hold the card. Your child must put back the card if s/he picks the wrong one. If your child chooses the right one, smile or clap to show your delight at getting it right. Be enthusiastic.

If you like, you can keep to items of food. Remember that everything your child eats has a name such as Rice Krispies/Corn Flakes/chocolate/ice cream/ baked beans. You can collect empty packets and display them. Again get your child to bring you the "Rice Krispies". Clap if they get it right. At the beginning it may be trial and error but gradually you will see listening skills and understanding grow.

Language brings meaning to a small child. Every opportunity should be taken to help them make sense of the world. All children love routine and will enjoy activities more and more as they become more familiar with these every day listening routines. You will see your child's confidence grow from day to day especially as their listening skills develop and understanding improves.

Tips for improving concentration

- Remove distractors
- Establish eye contact
- Create interest – have something to interest your child
- Create curiosity – put it behind your back so that your child will want to listen to what you have to say
- Show excitement – especially when your child is trying!
- Clap, smile, even jump up and down to show you are pleased
- Spend time with your child – short regular routines work best. Five or ten minutes every day is much better than thirty minutes in a week. You will notice later how your child will initiate an activity, especially if the whole experience is a fun one!

Talking to your Child

Give simple instructions such as:

- Get your coat
- Sit down
- Tidy up
- Put it in the bin
- Get a book
- Open/close the door

At snack times you will use the same language every day for example, “Apple... do you want some apple? (You will soon see that your child will gradually learn what these things are)

You can extend this to other items such as milk, banana, biscuit etc.

Always encourage your child to give you an oral response such as to say “thank you” and to respond to choices, even if you are only getting a babble sound. Do always encourage vocalization. Try to give a choice such as “Do you want milk or juice?” Or “Do you want toast or a biscuit?”

Repetition is so important. You may do the same activity week after week and not get a positive response - then one day your child will surprise you and seem to understand better than before. We must keep repeating and going over things again and again; this is after all, how children learn!

Developing Understanding

Develop your child's understanding in any way you can. Always encourage good listening and with daily repetition of everyday language, you will soon see your child begin to understand.

Some examples of early everyday vocabulary are:

- Cup/Plate
- Toaster
- Television
- Spoon/knife/fork
- Scissors
- Keys
- Table/Chairs
- Shoes

REFERENCES

Elks & McLachlan 1999

Language Builders: Advice and Activities to Encourage Children's Communication Skills. Elkan

Yorkshire Cochlear Implant Services

Listening is Fun A Guide for Parents and Families of Cochlear Implanted Children. Med-El

For further advice please contact the Sensory Service via phone: 028 25 661 258 or email:
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