

Developing good listening skills

Why do this?

Listening is an important skill. We are required to process auditory information in most situations throughout the day. Most of the time we do this without thinking as grown ups but children acquire these skills over time. ^[SEP]Children with auditory processing disorder and listening difficulties (and indeed all children) find it helpful to talk about listening really is and how they can become better at listening.

Things to discuss and do....

1. There is a difference between listening and hearing.

Listening is an active process, which requires attention and understanding. Hearing is a more passive process. I can hear but that does not mean I am listening.

^[SEP]Activity: Think of times when you have heard but not really listened to something. Think of times that you have listened well. What did you do?

2. What do we do when we listen?

What do we do with our eyes, hands feet and our bodies? When we listen our bodies focus on listening – not only our ears. We sit still (relaxed position rather than stiff and uncomfortable), we look at the speaker, our hands and feet are still (we don't fidget or kick the table or play with our fingers). We actually listen with our whole bodies rather than just our ears. This is called 'whole-body' listening.

3. Discuss different types of listening (if the child is old enough to understand this)

Preparatory attention	Choosing what to attend to and getting ready for listening
Selective attention	Attending to target & blocking out competing stimuli
Divided attention	Attending to two or more targets (attention shifting) ^[SEP]
Vigilance	Attending to an intermittent target maintaining attention to a target over time
Sustained attention	Maintaining attention to a target over time

4. *Identify a good listener.*

What makes him/her a good listener? You can be a good listener too – it just takes a bit of practice.

5. *Advantages of listening versus penalties of not listening.*

- **Advantages of listening:** know what is happening, feel part of things.
- **Penalties of not listening:** don't know what is happening, miss important information and don't feel part of things, forget things like homework, and may get into trouble.

6. *Identify more challenging listening conditions* (including noise and different accents).

What can you do in these situations? For example, ask for noise to be reduced, ask for repetition, move where you are sitting.

7. *Experiencing not being listened to and evaluating others' and own listening behaviour.*

If you have established a good relationship and trust with a child, you can 'not listen' to something important they say and then discuss how this made them feel. Have the child evaluate your listening behaviour in this situation and in general. Have them evaluate their own listening behaviour. Think about what it feels like when someone has not listened to what you were saying!

8. *A practical tip:*

When working with a child it is helpful to have a picture of an owl (with big interesting eyes). Use a 'post-it' with the child's name and another with your name. Instead of saying 'Okay, I need you to listen and sit still and remember good listening skills' you can simply cover the owl's eyes with the 'post-it' with the child's name. This alerts them to their listening in a positive way. When listening improves remove the post-it. Similarly should the child feel you are not listening they can place the 'post-it' with your name over the owl's eyes. This can also be done with a class where a blank 'post-it' is used when the teacher feels someone is not listening. This engages the specific child and makes the others check their listening too.

9. *Evaluate your own listening behaviour.*

Use a 5-point scale or pictures to try to work out how good you really are at listening.

10. *Implement and evaluate* practical ideas and strategies for improving listening behavior – your own ideas and those of your teacher. What works for you?

11. *Reward good listening behaviour.*

The most effective reward is not a star or token but positive verbal feedback, highlighting the advantages of good listening.