

Attention and Listening Skills – Parent/Carer Advice Sheet

Some children find listening difficult, which may be caused by language comprehension difficulties, attention difficulties or hearing difficulties.

Children with poor attention and listening may become used to being confused which can make them frustrated or unconfident. They tend to guess at the topic being discussed or they tune out altogether. They also find it difficult to sit at the table, focus on one activity at a time and follow instructions.

Some children's difficulties with paying attention and listening are affected by diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Strategies to encourage active listening at home

- Call your child's name or touch them to gain their attention.
- Remove distractions when playing with child – e.g. turn the TV off and have one toy out at a time for your child to concentrate on.
- Ensure your child can see your face and hands.
- Pause between sentences to enable the child to process the information.
- Repeat 'key words' and phrases.
- Use visual cues e.g. pointing/gesture/pictures/written words.
- Involve your child in active demonstrations of the topic material e.g. by holding up pictures or objects.
- Praise child for active listening. Be specific e.g. "Very good John, I can see that you're sat down and looking at me".
- Be a good listener yourself! Model good talking, looking, and sitting. Use role-play to demonstrate the difference between 'good listening' and 'poor listening'.
- Give children frequent breaks from listening.
- Ask 'checking' questions to ensure your child has listened and understood.
- Play short simple games that your child is interested in.
- Try to stick to a set routine. Using pictures as a visual timetable may help.

Activities (Parent and Child/in a Group)

- Simon says
- Shopping game i.e. 'I went to the shops and I bought..... (each player adds one more item to the list). You may choose variations e.g. "I put out on the washing line.....
- Eye spy
- Clapping rhythms (children to listen and copy)
- Sound lotto (Child matches the sound heard to a picture)
- Barrier games (2 sets of objects are separated by a barrier. Child listens to adult's instructions and arranges objects to match the adults. The barrier is then removed to check if the child has arranged them correctly).
- Fruit salad (Position the children in a circle. Each child/or small group of children is given the name of a fruit. The adult calls out one or more of the fruits and those specific children swap chairs, e.g. 'apples and oranges'. When 'fruit salad' is called, all the children swap places. You could also include actions e.g. 'oranges and lemons jump' etc.
- Listening and identifying 'everyday' sounds. (The children/child listens to a sound and tries to name what it is.)

Useful websites and resources

- Talking Point: <http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/>