

Attention and listening

This is the child's ability to focus on the speaker and listen to what is being said. A child's attention and listening skills can affect their understanding and use of spoken language and speech sounds.

Everyday strategies

- Focus the child's attention before giving an instruction.
- Use shorter sentences.
- Use gesture to support what you are saying.
- Create an environment with less distractions e.g. reduce background noise such as television and radio.
- Encourage the child to finish an activity before moving on.
- Encourage the child to find things for you during everyday tasks, e.g. getting dressed, going shopping, and putting toys away.

Activities

Easiest:

- "Ready, Steady, Go" games: The child needs to wait for you to say "go" before they act: e.g. running a car down a ramp, rolling a ball, pressing a pop-up toy.
- Games with instruments: Make homemade instruments e.g. spoon and pan, two saucepan lids as cymbals, shakers with yoghurt pots and lentils. Play "stop - go" games with them i.e. say "go" and play the instruments then say "stop" (maybe with a hand signal as well).
- Nursery rhymes: Recite nursery rhymes and leave pauses for the child to fill in the appropriate word
- Animal noises: Make animal noises and ask the child to point to the correct picture or animal
- Ball game: All the players (at least three) sit in a circle. Before you throw or roll the ball to another player, call their name. Each time you call out the name of the person catching the ball. In this way both the child throwing and the child catching the ball will have to listen carefully to what you say.
- Ticking clock: Hide a ticking clock in one of three boxes. The child must identify which box the clock is in by listening.



Harder:

- Shopping Games: Have an array of four or five items in a 'shop' e.g. egg carton, juice bottle, cereal packet, margarine tub, bag of bread and also have a shopping bag to put things in. Ask the child to go and buy e.g. the eggs and bread, increase to three items and then extend choice to four, five or six items.
- Posting Games: Have pictures of objects and ask the child to post you two, three or more of the objects
- Musical Bumps/Statues: Listen for when the music stops and sit down or keep very still.
- Games with Instruments: Have three musical instruments. Play one sound and get the child to copy it. Then play a sequence of two and see if he/she can copy the sounds. Eventually you could make another identical set of instruments and play a sequence behind a screen. See if the child can copy the sequence without seeing the instruments.

- Simon says: The aim is for the child to follow your instructions – but only when you begin the instruction with “Simon says”. This game can be made simpler by removing the “*Simon says*” part. Swap roles so the child gives the instructions
- Describe a picture/Make a model: Draw a simple picture/ make a model (e.g. a tower) without the child seeing what you have done. Describe the picture to them for them to draw/make it. (E.g., “***Draw a house in the middle of the page. It has got a pointed roof and a chimney.***”). The aim is for the child to draw a picture/make a model identical to your own without him/her seeing it
- Make up a story: Make up a story with the child’s name in it. Every time you say his/her name, the child has to nod, stand up or put their arms up
- Make a scrapbook using photographs of people doing things or events



Encourage your child to give you a word/sentence to write underneath (depending on their language level). Sometimes this may encourage better sentences than if your child is just telling you.