



## Happy Talk's Top 10 Tips for Attention and Listening

### 1. Reduce Distractions



You can help develop your child's attention and listening skills by reducing noise and visual distractions around them such as turning off the TV/radio, going to a quieter room and having fewer toys out. This reduces the amount of information that your child has to process and helps them to focus on what you are saying. Before a child is able to understand and use language themselves, they have to be able to focus their listening on spoken language such as single words and sentences.

### 2. Gain Attention

Gain your child's attention before you give an instruction or talk to your child. You can do this by getting down to their level, saying their name or giving them a touch prompt. This will help to ensure that their focus is on you when you are speaking.

Changing the sound of your voice e.g., using a higher pitch; can also help to keep your child's attention. It will also help your child to focus on what you are saying if you speak at a slower rate.



### 3. Play Listening Games



Play listening games with your child such as:

**Listening walks-** Going on a walk and talking about what sounds you can hear in the environment e.g., birds singing, car engine, lawn mower etc.

**Animal sounds-** Encouraging and modelling the sounds that animals make in play e.g., cow- "moo."

**Instrumental sounds-** Introduce your child to instrument sounds and make music with items around the house e.g., tapping a pan with a spoon, rice in a bottle etc.





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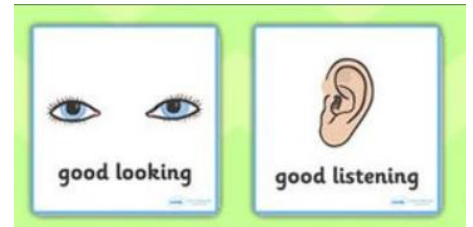
## 4. Turn-Taking Activities



Playing simple turn-taking games is a great way to develop attention and listening skills as well as develop interaction skills. This could be by rolling or kicking a ball to each other, taking turns blowing bubbles or using games such as Pop-up Pirate that encourage the child to wait for their turn in a motivating activity. Start off by taking one turn each, and then build up to more turns being taken in the activities as your child develops these skills.

## 5. Use Specific Praise

Use specific praise to tell your child what they are doing well in relation to their attention and listening. Develop their understanding that ears help us to listen, and eyes help us to look. Use phrases such as 'good listening' and 'good looking' when your child demonstrates these skills. This helps them to learn that showing these behaviours is a positive and will encourage them to try it again.



## 6. Use Motivating Items



Use motivating items and toys to capture your child's attention. A child is more likely to engage and focus for longer on items or toys that they find motivating. Once they are engaged, you can talk about the item they are looking at using single words and short phrases. Cause and effect toys and blowing bubbles are often highly motivating activities that encourage attention and listening, and interaction.

## 7. Use Simple Language

Keeping language simple by using single words and short sentences makes it easier for children to attend to and understand what you are saying. You can model vocabulary by talking about what their attention is focused on e.g., "train" or "big train." This helps to focus their attention on words and connect the word to the object or situation.

It is important to repeat words many times as a child needs to hear a word 200 times in context before they are able to understand and use it themselves!





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## 8. Gradually Increase Time



A child's attention and listening skills gradually develop over time. It is important when engaging in an activity that your expectations of how long they can attend for is realistic. Start with a short amount of time such as 10 seconds. Once they have achieved this, gradually increase by 10 seconds each time building up to minutes. Give your child praise for the amount of time they have engaged in the activity.

## 9. Movement Breaks

Incorporate lots of movement breaks into your day to help your child's focus and attention. This could be by going outside for a walk, dancing, exercising, and doing chores around the house. Playing games like 'Simon Says' and 'Musical bumps/statues' are also great activities to develop attention and listening and provide movement.



## 10. Check Hearing



If your child has not had a hearing test recently, it would be useful to rule this out as a reason to why they are having difficulty with their attention and listening skills. For example, between the ages of 2 and 6, it is very common for children to experience 'glue ear' which results in dulled hearing which can be likened to hearing underwater. For a child's attention and listening skills to be able to develop, they need to be able to hear clearly. You can go to your GP and ask for a referral to Audiology for a hearing test.

### Get in Touch!



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