

Audiology

Patient Information Leaflet (PL)

Listening skills for pre-school children



This leaflet has been provided to help answer some of the questions you may have about pre-school listening skills.

What is the difference between hearing and listening?

Hearing and listening are different skills. Hearing is the ability to detect a sound. This can be tested in clinic. Listening is the ability to pay attention to sounds, or to make a conscious effort to hear.

If a child has normal hearing sensitivity, they may still need some encouragement to improve their listening skills. It is important that babies and young children learn to listen well at home. However, even if they develop good listening skills at home, some children can find it difficult in busier situations at play group or nursery where there are more distractions.

Children with a history of hearing difficulties may have poor listening skills.

How can I develop my child's listening skills at home?

- Make sure that you get your child's attention before speaking to him/ her. Call their name first and then speak
- Don't shout. If you move closer to your child, your voice will naturally sound louder
- Give your child plenty of time to ask questions
- Face your child when speaking and make sure that they can see your face
- Give some visual clues. For example, point at the object you are talking about
- Reduce background noise if possible. Be aware of noise from the television, other children and household appliances
- Play some of the listening games listed overleaf.

Which activities encourage good listening skills?

You may like to try joining in when your child is playing, so that they have a chance to listen and to respond to meaningful language. This might include pretend activities such as cooking, talking on the telephone, having tea, going to the doctor or shopping.

Talk to your child whilst doing everyday activities, using the same words each time you repeat a routine. This could include activities such as bath time, getting dressed, getting ready to go out, putting away the shopping and sorting out the washing.

What about games to develop listening skills?

Play sound recognition games: Make a sound using a toy (or mobile phone app), so that your child has to guess where the sound is coming from

Sing 'sound and action' songs, examples of suitable rhymes include:

- The Grand Old Duke of York
- Incey Wincey Spider
- Heads, shoulders, knees and toes
- The wheels on the bus

Play memory games, for example:

- Ask your child to copy a rhythm made by clapping or banging on a drum
- What's missing game (where your child guesses what is missing from a tray of items)
- "I went for a walk and saw..." where the list of things seen gets added to by each player

Silly sentence games

- Say a sentence in which one word is incorrect and then ask your child to guess which word is wrong.

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