

Tips from the team: Attention and Listening



Attention and listening skills are important for language and learning. Paying attention involves concentrating on an activity and bringing together information from different sources (e.g. what you see and what you hear). Some children are really good at focusing their attention on an activity of interest, but can find it challenging to transfer their attention to listening to another person. Active listening and processing can look many different ways. Some people listen best when they move around, look away, fidget with their hands, or have a quiet space- it's important for us to recognise that this is different for each individual.

Here are some ideas for strategies that might help your child with attention and listening:

- Get your child's attention by saying their **name** and getting down to **their level** before giving them information. Some children listen better **by not making eye contact** so don't worry if your child is not looking directly at you when you are talking to them.
- Some children need **extra time** to move from focusing on an activity they are doing to listening to you/ doing a new activity, so make sure you allow for this.
- Use **simple concrete language** when talking to your child. Give **one-step** instructions or one piece of information at a time.
- Give your child **extra time** to process spoken information and respond (give one piece of information and then wait up to 10 seconds for a response).
- Use **visuals** to help support your spoken language (e.g. use gestures/signs, objects, or pictures to show your child what you are talking about).



- Make sure your child is feeling **calm and regulated** before doing a learning activity and has a plan for sensory breaks during focused activities (e.g. movement breaks).
- Some children find that moving around in their seat or fidgeting with their hands helps them to focus so **allow your child to do what works best** for them.
- Help your child to identify what helps them to listen and focus and to ask for these strategies when they need them (e.g. to ask for a hand fidget toy or a movement break when needed).
- Visual aids such as **visual timetables, first-then boards, I am working for charts** can be useful for helping children stay on task.
- Try to keep challenging activities **short** and alternate with motivating activities and movement breaks (e.g. First-writing, Then-music and dancing).
- Giving a **countdown** can be reassuring for children as it helps them to know what to expect (e.g. 'five more left and then we take a break').
- When possible, try to adapt activities to make them more motivating for your child based on their **interests and preferences** (e.g. if they have to do a reading task as part of the curriculum, you could try to find a book or passage about one of their favourite tv characters).
- When possible, try to **reduce environmental distractions** if your child has to carry out a challenging activity (e.g. minimising noise during homework time).
- Provide **positive reinforcement** and specific feedback (e.g. 'well done for listening to my instruction' 'I really liked how you asked me to say that again').
- Consider **other factors** which may impact on your child's attention (e.g. sensory factors, fatigue, medication, time of day). Try to work out are there **particular times of day** that work better for your child for focusing their attention on challenging tasks.
- Try to **avoid introducing too many new activities at once**, and ensure that your child has opportunities to achieve **success** in the activities they are doing.