

Developing attention & listening skills

Attention and listening skills are the foundation for language and learning. Children develop these skills at different speeds. They are essential in a child's social and academic development and include:

- Social skills
- Understanding language
- Following instructions
- Learning to communicate
- Speech sounds
- All areas of learning

There are useful ways to help your child develop these skills:

- **Say your child's name** as a cue for them to know when they need to stop and listen.
- **Talk about good listening skills** - sit still, good eye contact and think about what is being said.
- **Keep your language short, simple and in the order it is going to happen.** It makes it easier when a child does not need to listen for too long. Give instructions in small steps and give them one piece of information at a time. Emphasise the key words that will help your child to know what to do. Try to speak slowly and calmly and make sure that the child can hear you.
- **Check your child has listened to instructions or information** by asking them to explain in their own words what you have said. Writing down the instructions or key words may also help them to understand depending on the age of the child. For older children, check if they have understood the question/instruction by encouraging them to repeat back what they think they are expected to do.
- **Praise your child for good listening** – be specific about what they have done well 'Well done, really good listening when I read you the story.' and make it a positive experience. Celebrate success and achievements together.
- **Use visuals clues** such as gestures, photos and objects alongside what you say. This can help focus their attention and listening.
- **Give time frames** for how long your child has to attend to a task, for example, when doing homework set an egg timer for a realistic amount of time and after this they can have a break.
- **Try changing the environment** to provide a calm and quiet learning surrounding to reduce distractions such as turning off all the screens and tidying away toys.
- **Make the experience fun and positive for all.** Sharing an activity that your child loves will motivate and encourage them to take part. When telling stories of the child's choice, make them more interesting and fun by acting out different characters and using 'voices'.