

4: Attention and Listening

EYFS Communication and Language Development ELG 01: Listening and Attention

Ages and stages for attention and listening development

Age	Looking and listening
By 6 months	Can pay fleeting attention but any new event will distract. Flits from one object/person to another.
12 months	Concentrates on the most powerful stimulus, either visual or auditory.
18 months	Concentrates on task of own choosing; does not tolerate intervention from adult. Single channelled attention.
2 years	Single channelled attention. Cannot listen to adult directions during play but can shift attention with adult help. Starts to attend to adults choice of activity for short periods with prompts when around 2 ½ years.
3 years	Still single channelled but starts to listen to adult. Can attend to adult's choice of activity for longer; needing less frequent prompts.
4 years	Attention single channelled but can control focus and shift from listening to doing. Child looks automatically at speaker. Starts to take on board spoken instructions related to task.
5 years	Integrated looking and listening are well established and maintained.

Knowles, Masidlover (1982) Derbyshire Language Scheme. Cooke, J Williams, D (1985) Working with Children's Language Oxon: Winslow Press

4.1: Attention and Listening: General strategies

Children need to be able to listen and pay attention to sounds and language used around them before they are able to talk.

Many young children have a short span of attention and those with communication difficulties may have particular problems with concentration.

The child may need help with learning to listen and concentrate so that their speech and language skills can develop.

Strategies

- Reduce background noise as much as possible: children find it difficult to ignore background noise like TV/radio/traffic noise. They will find it easier to listen and concentrate in a quiet setting so turn off the TV/radio and even close windows when you're playing together.
- Reduce distractions in the room: put other toys away, such as in boxes, so there are only two or three to choose from.
- Make use of the time when you are alone with the child (5-10 minutes is enough) to play together when there are no other children needing your attention.
- Be face to face with the child, at the same level as them, opposite and close together.
- Make sure the child is looking at you and listening to you before speaking to them; if necessary hold their hand or call their name to attract their attention.
- Having a physical marker for the child to sit on, such as a mat or small chair, can help.

Activities

- Sit together in a quiet room and **talk about the sounds you can hear** around you (e.g. cars on the road, a dog barking, birds singing).
- Find a **noisy toy** or object (e.g. a loudly ticking clock) and hide it around the room. Encourage the child to find the noisy object.

- **Jack-in-the-box:** all crouch down and spring up when you hear a drum bang/clap etc.
- **Musical Bumps/Statues:** play some music and the children must sit down/stand still when the music stops.
- **musical instruments/shakers/noisemakers** (two of each type): use one noisemaker behind a screen so they child can't see it. Can they come and **find the one that matches?**
- **Sing action songs** e.g. 'Wheels on the Bus', 'Heads and Shoulders', 'Wind the Bobbin up', 'Here we go round the mulberry bush', 'Incy Wincey spider', 'Two little dicky birds'.
- Collect two identical sets of farm animal toys. Lay out one set of animals in front of the child. Hide one of the animals from the other set under a box, without the child seeing, and imitate the noise it makes. Encourage the child to **listen and choose the animal they think** makes the same noise then check if it matches the animal under the box.
- Hide two or three objects, letting your child watch you as you do it. See if they can go and **find each object** as you ask for it.
- **'Ready steady go' games:** play with toys such as a car run or a ball. The child has to **wait** for 'ready steady... **go**' before carrying out the action. You may need to hold the car or ball until you say 'go' at first, to show them how to wait and listen.

Additional visual support:

- Use a visual aid (see 4:4: Attention and Listening visual support) when completing an activity.
- Position this at the child's eye level and introduce it by pointing to each picture, saying:
'We can.....sit with our bottoms on the floor and legs crossed.....we can listen with our ears (mime switching ears on).....we can look with our eyes (point to your eyes)'.
- You can then use this to praise the child each time they do it e.g. 'good sitting', 'well done, you are sitting really well', 'good listening with your ears' 'lovely watching with your eyes'.
- Consider using a **visual timetable** to support attention and listening. This is explained on the next page.

4.2: Visual Timetables

A 'now and next' board or 'first and then' board can be developed into a visual timetable once the child understands the idea of two activities happening in order.







Visual timetables can have photos or symbols depending on what the child understands. They can be only a few activities, the whole day or even a whole week, depending on the child's needs.

Visual timetables, if used regularly, can help:

- the child to see that they will get a chance to do their favourite activity later on
- the anxious child to see and understand what activities will happen over a set time period
- transition from one activity to another
- the child to remember what they did that day
- the child to eventually use symbols or photographs from a timetable to make choices or express wants and needs
- bridge the gap between home and school:
 - o staff can help the child to express what they have done at the weekend using pictures drawn by the parent
 - o parents can help the child talk about their day at nursery using pictures drawn by the staff

At the beginning of the day, you can sit down with the child/a group of children and draw the activities that they will be doing in the correct sequence. Each time the child completes an activity, it can be crossed off or removed. You can then talk about what the child will be doing next.

An example timetable:

					
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writing	playing with cars	coats on for outside play	snack time	story time	mum comes to take you home
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Alternatively, you can make some permanent pictures or symbols of common activities or take photos of the activities. Mount the pictures onto card and laminate them so you can re-use them. You can make a long strip of plastic pockets to contain the day's activities and insert the correct symbols in the right order. Alternatively, you can stick Velcro (hook fastening tape) to the back of each symbol and stick them onto a strip of card that also has Velcro (loop tape).

You could also make a 'finished' pocket for the pictures of the activities to go in once they are completed.

4.3: Achieving Joint Attention

There are many different games that you can play together which will help the child to join in and share attention with you. All of these games can be played again and again. Children love repetition!

Balloons

- Blow up a balloon and let it go; play 'ready, steady.....go!'
- Let the child feel the air coming out of the balloon.
- Throw and catch balloons together.
- Draw faces on the balloons.
- Pop them!

Building blocks

- Encourage the child to build towers or walls and knock them down: play 'ready, steady.....go!'
- Line the bricks up and push them along like a train.
- Bang them together.

Stacking cups

- Build towers: play 'ready, steady.....go!'
- Hide things under them.
- Roll them to each other.
- Play with stacking cups in the bath: fill and empty them with water and float them.
- Play with stacking cups in the sand and use them to build sand castles.

Bubbles

- Use a hand-held bubble bottle with wand (**not** a bubble machine!).

- Play 'ready, steady..... go!' before you blow them.
- Pop bubbles and say 'pop!'
- Watch the bubbles rise and fall.

Balls, cars and trains

- Roll these around the room or to each other.

Shape sorters, posting boxes and puzzles

- Sit with the child while they take the pieces out and put them back in again.
- Let the child show you what they find interesting, by looking, pointing or saying a sound.
- Talk about what they are doing and looking at e.g. 'it doesn't fit!', 'Daddy help', 'yes, there's the elephant!'

Songs and rhymes

- Singing rhymes and songs together will help to improve the child's concentration.
- Songs with actions are especially good because they encourage looking and listening.
- Songs where the child has to **wait** for an action or word/sign are good because this holds their attention. For example:

Humpty Dumpty
The Wheels on the Bus
Row the Boat

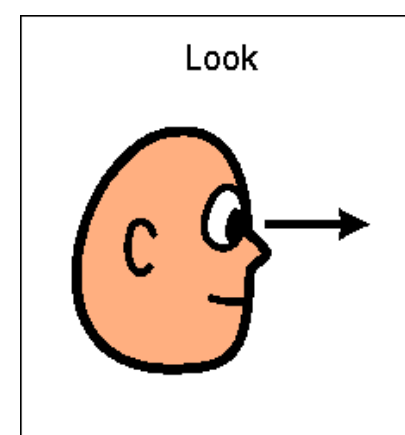
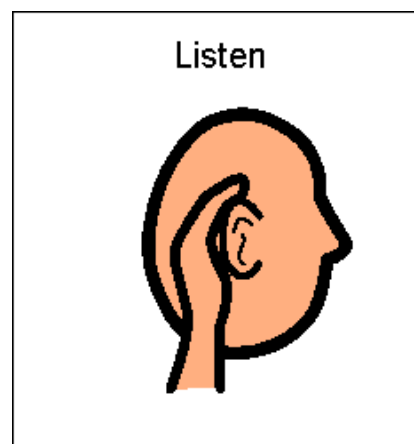
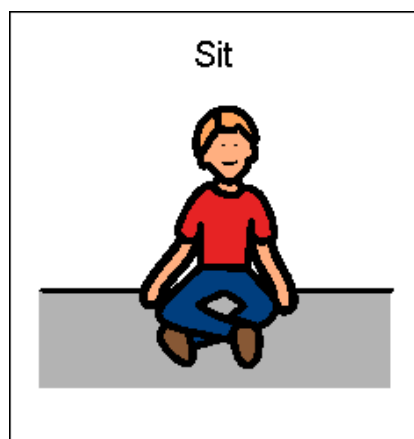
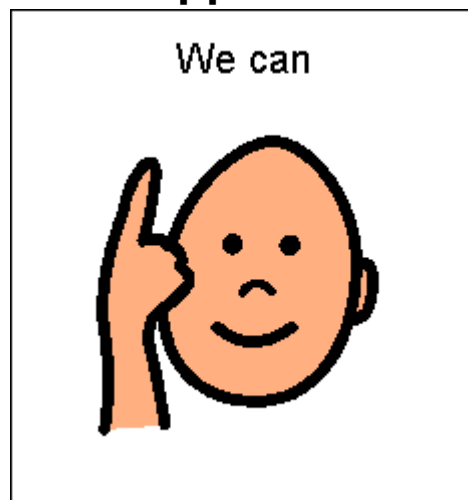
This Little Piggy Went to Market
Round and Round the Garden
Incy Wincy Spider

Use your favourite songs and rhymes and make them up too!

Books

- Look at simple board books and 'lift the flap' books together.
- Encourage the child to turn the pages; don't rush, let them take their time!
- The child might want to look at the same page again and again; that's fine. They are more likely to concentrate if they're doing what they want to do!
- Let the child show you what they find interesting by looking, pointing or saying a sound.
- Don't worry about reading the words now; the child will have more fun looking at the pictures and you can tell them the names of things.

4.4: Attention and Listening visual support



4.5: How to develop attention and listening skills

Target: **The child will develop their attention to everyday sounds.**

Activities

- **Listening Walk**

Begin inside and be really quiet. Talk about what sounds you can hear inside and outside e.g. drip of tap, aeroplane outside, traffic lights beeping. What sounds can the child hear?

Move outside and go for a walk. Talk about whether the sounds are the same or different. Stop and listen really carefully: what quieter sounds can you hear?

- **Where's the sound?**

Find some noisy toys or instruments. Ask the child to close their eyes while you make one of the sounds. See if the child can find the correct one. If you can see them going to choose the wrong one, prompt them to listen again and make the sound again. Gradually make the sounds quieter as they get better at listening.

- **Hear the beat**

Use a drum/shaker/back of a pan and beat out or pat a simple short rhythm for the child. Encourage them to listen and make the same rhythm back.

- **Music games**

Play musical statues or musical bumps: when the music stops encourage the child to do an action e.g. stamp feet, clap hands.

- **Find some toy animals**

Ask the child to close their eyes and you make a sound for one of the animals; see if the child can find the correct animal. If you can see them going to choose the wrong one, prompt them to listen again and make the sound again.

Name:

Date target set:

Outcome: Achieved = 2 Partially achieved = 1 Not achieved = 0

Date	Outcome	Comment

4.6: How to develop attention and listening skills

Target: The child will be able to focus on adult-led activities for up to 5 minutes, with support.

Strategies

- Use the child's name and gain their eye contact before giving any instructions.
- Praise the child when they stay focussed on the task, using the attention visual aid.
- Use a visual timetable for structured periods of the day so the child can see what is expected of them (refer to 4.2 for how to set up visual timetables).
- Remind the child throughout activities to look and listen. When they start to lose focus, let them know how much longer the specific activity will take e.g. 'one more turn and then cars are finished'.
- Warn the child which activity will come next **before** the end of the previous activity e.g. 'one more turn, then post box!'
- You can help the child focus more easily by showing them that when the task is finished there is a reward of a favourite activity.
- Use a 'finished' bag or box to support understanding that an activity has ended: when the activity is finished you can say 'car is finished' and put in the box/bag.
- Use simple language at the child's level of understanding; for example, using two or three words/signs at a time.
- Refocus the child's attention to the group task or the activity they had chosen when their attention is lost.
- Play games in small groups where the child has to listen to the music in order to take part e.g. sound lotto, Simon Says, musical bumps/statues.

Name:

Date Target Set:

Outcome: Achieved = 2 Partially achieved = 1 Not achieved = 0

Date	Outcome	Comment

4.7: How to develop sitting and listening skills

Target: The child will be able to sit and listen for 5-8 minutes.

Strategies

- **To sit and listen for 5 – 8 minutes**
Use a countdown chart or sand/egg timer so the child can see for how much longer they need to remain seated. Alternatively, you can use blocks/tokens to be taken away one at a time, so they can see the time counting down visually. Go through tasks slowly using verbal prompts; for example, use their name to gain their attention, ask them to look, listen and join in the activity. Praise them for 'good sitting' using the attention visual.
- **To sit and listen to a story with illustrations**
Use your chosen visual support.
Ensure that the child sits close to you or at the front of the group.
Involve the child in turning the pages of the book or lifting the flaps.
- **To listen and follow a story with few visual cues**
Use rewards/stickers to extend attention and listening skills throughout the activity.
Ensure the child is sitting where they can easily see you.
Check by asking simple questions to see if the child is following the story.
- **To sustain attention for 5-8 minutes in a 1:1/small group/class situation**
Use rewards/stickers to extend attention and listening skills throughout the activity or use a visual support as a reminder (see visual aid on 4:4).
Seat the child at the front of the group or closest to the adult to maximise prompts/cues for listening.
Praise the child for 'good sitting' and 'good listening'.

Name:

Date Target Set:

Outcome: Achieved = 2

Partially achieved = 1

Not achieved = 0

Date	Outcome	Comment
