Attention & Listening - 1

Helping your child with Attention and Listening

Listening and paying attention are important for children's speech and language development and their learning. Listening is more than just hearing – we can hear that the TV is on, but not be listening to it because we are focused on something else. When we hear new or complicated information we have to listen hard to be able to understand. Some children are too easily distracted to listen and learn effectively. Babies and young children develop their listening and attention skills in recognisable stages, and some children need help to move through these stages.

If a child's listening and attention skills are poor, they may not always understand what is said to them. This is really because they aren't listening properly to the words, rather than not understanding the words. Sometimes, this may make them seem naughty or wilful. They may seem to ignore you when you speak to them, or forget what they have been told. They may not be able to play with any toy for more than a few moments and quickly lose interest in activities.

These tips will help improve your child's listening and attention skills.

- Try to have some quiet time each day when you can play and talk with your child.
- Make sure you have your child's attention before speaking to them.
  - say their name or touch them to gain their attention
- Facing your child, make eye contact to help them listen to you.
- Background noise, e.g. other people talking, radio, television etc, is a distraction.
  - try to reduce it where possible
- Talk slowly and clearly.
- Keep tasks and instructions short.
- When you hear a noise during the day, e.g. phone ringing, dog barking – draw their attention to it and show them what the sound was.
- Look at books or catalogues, talking about the sounds that things in the pictures make, encourage your child to imitate the sounds.
- Play short specific games and gradually increase the time you expect your child to concentrate – one minute may be enough at first, then increase with an extra page of a book, or a few pieces of a jigsaw.
- When your child's attention begins to wander, encourage them to 'do just one more then we're finished'.
- Remember, games that are too hard or too easy will make the child lose interest more quickly.
- Remember, your child's attention will be affected if your child is tired or unwell.
- Praise your child for concentrating and listening well e.g. ‘good listening’.

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Production date: June 2010  Author: Department of Speech and Language Therapy  Code: 0610226