



Attention and Listening

Ideas to Support Younger Children





Why are attention and listening skills important?

Attention and listening skills are very important for children to be able to make sense of the words they hear and to respond to others. They form the foundation for the development of language and literacy skills. Children must first learn to pay attention to people, then to objects, then to people and objects. Good attention and listening skills enable children to learn new skills, including how to use language.

Participation in a short sensory motor circuit is a great way to energise and also prepare children for activities that require most attention and listening. The aim is to focus concentration in readiness for the activities that lie ahead. For more information, please see:

<https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lets-Get-Regulated-Information-for-Parents.pdf>

Children might hear what you say, but they may not really listen to it. It is important that children become **active listeners**, thinking about what has been said, and with practice, beginning to make sense of it.

Top Tips for Developing Attention and Listening Skills:

- 👍 Help your child to listen more by reducing background noise as much as possible e.g. turn down the TV, radio etc. This ensures that you have your child's full attention.
- 👍 Call your child's name to get their attention.
- 👍 Get down to your child's level to gain their attention.
- 👍 Support your child to stop what they are doing before giving instructions.
- 👍 Keep instructions short and simple.
- 👍 Use gesture and visuals to support your child's attention to tasks.
- 👍 Make use of everyday opportunities to encourage listening e.g. go on a listening walk and see how many sounds your child is able to hear and identify.



This booklet aims to provide parents of young children with games and activity ideas to develop children's attention and listening skills by:

- Motivating them to keep their attention through fun ideas
- Offering them opportunities to wait their turn in games
- Encouraging them to remember what they have to do
- Providing opportunities to listen to instructions during fun games
- Focussing their attention on the person speaking

These games also support the development of many other skills such as:

- Visual memory
- Planning and sequencing
- Motor Planning
- Body awareness
- Understanding concepts

You will see these skills listed at the end of each game idea.

Kim's Game



How to play:

Place objects on a tray. These objects could all be from the same category to support your child's understanding of categories e.g. transport items could include toy car, lorry, train, boat. Talk about the objects and put a name tag on each one.

Use a towel or blanket to cover the objects, and take one object away. Ask your child to guess which object has been taken away.

Make this activity more difficult by:

- ✓ Increasing the number of objects you put on the tray for your child to remember.
- ✓ Increasing the number of objects you take away.

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Visual Memory**

 **Planning and Sequencing**

 **Vocabulary**

 **Following Instructions**

Fruit Salad Game



How to play: Sit in a circle and give everyone a picture of a 'fruit' or a real fruit. Whoever is the leader calls out a fruit. If the leader says 'bananas', anyone holding the bananas switches seats. If you say **"Fruit Salad"** everyone has to swap.

Make this activity more difficult by:

- ✓ Increasing the number of fruits e.g.
 - Call out the names of two different fruits and those people have to swap places (e.g. "bananas and oranges").
 - Call out the names of three different fruits and those people have to swap places (e.g. "bananas, oranges apples"), etc.
- ✓ Taking away the pictures and seeing if your child can remember their fruit.
- ✓ Swapping the pictures around after a few turns so that your child now have to listen for a different item.

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Memory**

 **Spatial Awareness**

 **Motor Planning**

 **Turn taking**

Simon Says



How to play: One person is 'Simon' and the others are players. Simon tells the players what to do but they must only follow the commands that begin with the words 'Simon Says'. You can all take turns being Simon.

Example commands:

1 part:

- ✓ Touch your toes
- ✓ Hands on your head

Make this activity easier by: using pictures of actions to support the verbal instruction.

Make this activity more difficult by: giving longer instructions, e.g.

2 parts, e.g.

- ✓ First do a twirl, then clap your hands.
- ✓ First jump, then count to 3.

3 parts, e.g.

- ✓ First shake your body, next touch your nose, last sit down.
- ✓ First run to the grass, next stamp your feet, last turn around.

This game also helps with the following skills:



Following Instructions



Social Skills



Motor Skills



Memory



Body Awareness



Understanding Concepts

Shopping Game



How to play: Collect empty cartons and boxes and set up a pretend shop. Ask your child to go to the shop and "buy" a list of items.

Choose an appropriate amount of items for your child's level. You could start by having your child listen to one item, then increase to two items, e.g. Say: "Get the banana" or "Get the banana and the bread".

Make this activity more difficult by:

- ✓ Introducing a shopping basket and a shopping trolley (pictures or toys) to make the instruction longer, e.g. "Put the banana in the trolley" or "Put the pizza in the basket".
- ✓ Asking your child to find different types of foods, e.g. "Find a fruit" or "Find a vegetable", "Find something you keep in the fridge".

Adapt:

Encourage your child to give the instructions to the shopper once they are familiar with the game.

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Motor Skills**

 **Organisation & Planning**

 **Independent Living Skills**

 **Active Listening**

 **Visual Recall**

 **Vocabulary**

Washing Line



How to play:

Tie a piece of string between two chairs.

Give your child different items of dolls' clothes, e.g. trousers, T-shirts, socks, pants, dresses.

Say: "Put dolly's socks / trousers / dress on the washing line".

Make this activity more difficult by:

- ✓ Using colour and item, e.g. "Put dolly's red socks on the line".
- ✓ Using patterns of the clothing, e.g. "Put the clothes with stripes / spots on the line".
- ✓ Giving your child two or more items to put on the line, e.g. "Put the scarf and pyjamas on the line".
- ✓ Introducing a washing machine and a washing line (pictures or toys), e.g. "Put the socks in the washing machine"

Adapt:

- Encourage your child to give the instructions once they are familiar with the game.

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Motor Skills**

 **Fine motor skills**

 **Independent Living Skills**

 **Active Listening**

 **Memory**

 **Organisation and Planning**

Listening to Stories and Songs



How to play:

Give everyone playing the game an object or a picture relating to a word in a story. Read the story. When they hear the word, they have to stand up.

This game can also be played with songs and nursery rhymes. For example, in 'Old McDonald', hand out toy animals or pictures of animals from the song to everyone. When they hear their animal named, they stand up.

Make this activity more difficult by:

Playing without objects or by giving additional words for the children to listen out for.

Adapt:

You can also play this by having the children listen out for a 'special word' during the activity. They should stand up when they hear it, e.g. "When you hear the word marshmallow, we all stand up".

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Waiting**

 **Awareness of Rhyme**

 **Word Recognition**

 **Turn taking**

Traffic Lights Game



How to play: Ask your child to start at one end of the yard/garden/room.

- On the command '**GREEN**', your child should run as **fast** as he/she can around the yard/garden/room.
- On the command '**AMBER**,' your child should **slow** down to a trot/jog.
- On the command '**RED**', your child should **stop**.

Give commands at random to keep your child paying attention!

Adapt:

- ✓ Use visual colour cards instead of verbal commands.
- ✓ Use other word/pictures to represent speed of movement e.g. snail, hare.
- ✓ DVD Player Game: You and your child find a space and change your movements according to instructions relating to the functions of a DVD player. For example:

Fast forward = run forward

Rewind = walk backwards

Play = walk forward

Eject = jump up

Pause = stop

This game also helps with the following skills:

 **Gross motor skills**

 **Memory**

 **Balance**

 **Understanding concepts**

Animal Walks



How to play: Discuss with your child how different animals move:

- Bunny hops - crouch down and spring up
- Kangaroo - jump two feet together
- Snake - lie on tummy and do a commando crawl
- Bear - crawl on all-fours
- Act like different types of dinosaurs
- Adopt positions/movements on the leader's command

Make this activity more difficult by:

- ✓ Increasing the distance over which your child has to move
- ✓ Increasing the length of time your child has to maintain each position
- ✓ Linking different types of animal walks
- ✓ Having an animal Olympics or an animal parade

This game also helps with the following skills:



Gross motor skills



Memory



Balance



Motor Planning



**Understanding action words
and concepts**

Take a message!



How to play:

- Two players at a time.
- Use two "phones" (e.g. toy phones, old mobile phones, cups connected by a string).
- Take turns saying a message. The other person has to repeat it back.

Make this activity more difficult by:

Using a longer or more complex sentence for the message.

Adapt:

Play with a group of people. The first child whispers a message to the person beside them and that person whispers to the next and so on. The last person repeats back the message that they have heard to the whole group. Does it match the original message or did it change?

This game also helps with the following skills:



Understanding



Saying sentences



Memory



Turn taking

Silly Stories



How to play:

- Read a familiar story but make deliberate mistakes.

For example: The Three Little Pigs: "The wolf huffed and puffed and kicked the house down".

Or

- Read a short unfamiliar story twice. Change some key details the second time you read it. For example:
 - First time: "Jenny's Dad told her to pick up her toys..."
 - Second time: "Jenny's Mum told her to pick up her apples..."
- Can your child spot the mistakes? Have a fun system where your child can alert you to the mistakes.
 - For example, your child could press a buzzer/ ring a bell/make a sound/ raise hand and say "major mistake!" etc.

Adapt:

Make this activity more difficult or easier by adding more of less mistakes for your child to spot. Difficulty can also be adapted by making the mistakes more obvious or more subtle.

This game also helps with the following skills:



Understanding sentences



Problem solving



Memory



Active listening



Listening Song



To the tune of Frere Jacques:

Eyes are watching,

Ears are listening,

Lips are closed,

Hands are still,

Feet are very quiet,

You should really try it,

Listening well, listening well



- ✓ This song can be sung every day as part of your daily routine.
- ✓ Remember to use gestures and point to body parts as you sing.
- ✓ You could use puppets to model 'good sitting' and 'good listening'.
- ✓ You could use visual helpers (pictures), e.g. for listening ears, good sitting.