

Starting school

Listening and understanding



Listening is a key skill for children to acquire, one that is critical for when they go to school. It is one of the basic building blocks of language and communication and one of the main ways in which children learn, through developing their understanding. For the first five years, most of a child's learning is verbal which is why it is vital we support them in developing good listening skills.

It is important to understand that when we are asking children to listen, we are asking them to do so much more, for example:

- Can you hear my voice?
- Can you listen to the words I am saying?
- Can you look at me or what I am asking you to look at?
- Can you filter out the sounds from the environment?
- Can you see what I am showing you?
- Can you break down my sentence and understand what I mean?
- Can you do all the above and for a period of time?

When we ask children to listen we are asking them to take part in a complex process that can be disrupted by many things. However, there are lots of ways we can support children's ability to listen and understand what is being said to them.

Listening and understanding

Sharing stories

Sharing stories together is a great way to support your child's listening skills. Think about what story books that you have available for your child. Are they still age appropriate? Where are they stored – are they accessible for your child to access when they want to look at books? Where are your child's books -are they in an area where they have limited distractions and is there a comfy area they can sit and enjoy their book? Do you only have fiction books – what about non-fiction books? Children love fact books too. Children are beginning to understand the link between the spoken word and the written word. They are beginning to link this to the many ways in which information is communicated and understood.

Find time to talk with your child

It is important to find quality time to talk to your child. The value of talking contributes to children's learning and development. It should be spontaneous as well as planned – following up on their questions and joining in their role play by developing conversations between characters. Encourage all members of the family to engage in conversations with them and ask them questions – where there needs to be a response beyond yes or no.

Role model good listening skills with your child

It is important for your child to understand that listening is just as important as talking. Try to give your child quality time and show them that you are listening to them and they have your full attention. At times, when your child comes to ask you something it may not be an appropriate time for you to speak with them, such as, when you are on the phone. Make sure they understand this and as soon as you are free – take time to have that conversation and listen to what they are saying to you. This will help them to understand that there might be times which are not appropriate for conversations and they might have to wait.

Listening to a set of instructions

One of the key areas that some children struggle with when they start school is to be able to follow a set of instructions, for example “Hang up your coat, put your book bag away and come and sit on the mat”. Practice giving your child sets of instructions at home to listen to, helping them to develop this skill.



Starting school

Listening and understanding



Story stones or cards

What you need -

- Small stones or cards
- Stickers or magazine pictures

This will help support your child with their expressive language, vocabulary, turn-taking, attention and listening. Story stones/cards are essentially very simple prompts for narrative play. All you need to do is get some flat and smooth stones from a craft shop or cards and decorate them with pictures of objects or animals. Begin by choosing one of the stones/cards and start a story based on the picture on it. Then encourage your child to pick one of the stones/cards and continue the story, you can do this until the end of the story. You could also scribe the story on paper so you can revisit at a later time and see if your child can recall the story details.



Starting school

Listening and understanding



Dance freeze or musical statues

What you need -

- A music player
- An open area free of obstacles

This will help support your child to pay attention and listen. Many of you will have played musical statues when you were little, and you will be pleased the rules haven't changed! Simple - dance when the music's on and freeze when it stops. It's as simple as that. Make sure that you pick music that is appropriate for children and that it's good for dancing. Feel free to join in with your child and see who is better at following instructions and freezing.



Starting school

Listening and understanding



Memory game

What you need -

- **A dozen paper plates**
- **Marker pens**

This will support your child in their development of skills in turn-taking, social interaction, attention and listening. This is a king-size variation of the good old pair matching game. Take several paper plates and markers and write some letters if you want your children to practice literacy, or draw shapes, animals and other items if it's time to build their vocabulary. Make sure you have two of each. Mix up the paper plates and lay them out on the floor. Your child needs to take their turn in finding the matching pair. This is a good game to play with family as it will encourage your child turn taking and a little healthy competition.

