

ADVICE SHEET

Some thoughts on listening skills

One of the KEY FUNCTIONS of pre-schools these days is to develop listening skills. Being able to listen is a skill that needs to be practiced.

Current evidence supports the view that we need to ensure that all our children are able to listen attentively and speak clearly and fluently before we try to teach them to read and write.

A good starting point is to think about sounds children can hear in your room, for e.g.:

Inside - breathing, clock ticking, adults making drinks in the kitchen

Outside - Cars, birds, wind, gardener, planes above, bells ringing, heels of shoes on the pavement.

Next, think about what opportunities your children have to explore and listen to body sounds, voice sounds and environmental sounds within your setting. These are the precursors to a child being able to identify sounds in words to learn to read, but also to help them to be ready for learning.

Here are a few suggestions:

BODY SOUNDS

- Songs where children have to add claps, knee pats, stamps-for eg, 'if you're happy and you know it'.
- Adding body percussion sounds to nursery rhymes.
- Play screen game where children guess what the sound is being made behind a screen.

VOICE SOUNDS

- Play games where children use their voices in a different way.
- Give opportunities for children to think about and explore how their voice sounds different when they sing, speak, shout, whisper, growl, squeak.
- Get the children to add sound effects to stories and songs.
- Ask the children to explore sound they can make with their voices-e.g, make your voice go down a slide.....wheee!, hiss like a snake, be a steam train like Thomas the Tank Engine.....ch ch ch.
- Make sounds to picture cards of animals.

ENVIRONMENTAL SOUNDS

- Go for sound walks
- Close eyes, ask them what they can hear
- Listen to every day sound made behind a screen such as water being poured or paper being torn and ask the children what they are
- Have tapes of familiar sounds and children match them to the pictures
- Hide a ticking clock in the setting and ask the children to find it

Other ideas to develop listening skills and gaining attention include:

- Using puppets and eye-catching props, for e.g. feather duster, to gain the child's attention and encourage him to look at you
- Saying the child's name before you give them any instructions
- Using repetitive rhymes and jingles that encourage the child to listen and take part, for e.g. **Touch your lips, Touch your knees, Touch your ears, Now listen to me!**
- Providing activities that are of high interest to engage the child e.g. bubble blowing.
- Naming the different types of session e.g. 'good listening time', 'good sitting time', 'story-time', so the child knows what is expected of them.
- Only expecting the child to sit still and listen for short periods.
- Gradually extending the listening/sitting times when the child shows he is happy and able to do this.
- Re-reading and re-telling familiar and favourite stories. This will give the child confidence to join in, to predict what is going to happen and to enjoy language.
- Using natural gestures and signing to accompany and emphasize language.
- Acting as a good role model by listening to the child and interact with what he has said i.e. be an active listener.
- Using a bell, rainmaker or tambourine to get the children to STOP

NB

To encourage good listening skills in a small group, emphasize the rules of good listening:

- Looking at the speaker.
- Listening to the speaker
- Sitting still.

In Circle Time, you can encourage them to let other children to have their turn to speak by using a soft toy, i.e. only the child who is holding the toy can speak.

Try to display the rules of good listening in a picture format and reinforce them with the use of Makaton signs.

