



# Advice for parents: Listening and attention

**Listening** is the ability to concentrate on a heard sound. Children gradually learn to filter out distractions to do this.

**Attention** is the ability to sustain listening skills for a period of time. Children's attention spans will develop with age but listening in large groups or in distracting environments will place more demands on these skills.

**Difficulties with attention and listening skills can lead to difficulties in a child's level of understanding.**

## How to help to develop your child's attention and listening skills

### 1. Reduce background noise and distractions where possible

### 2. Use an appropriate level of language

Keep language simple – "chunk" long, complex sentences into shorter easier ones, eg:

"Go and put your coat on and go outside with Kate to play"

Go and put your coat on (wait until this is done)

Go outside and play

### 3. Get your child's full attention before giving instructions

You could do this by calling your child's name, getting on their level and making eye contact before giving instructions. It is important to make sure that your child stops what he/she is doing before you start talking to him/her.

### 4. Repeat instructions to your child

Children learn to listen from one to one instructions first, so if you are speaking to a number of people you may need to repeat the message to your child one to one.

### 5. Give your child opportunities to practice his/her listening skills

Listening does not have to be a passive activity where children are spoken to and they must sit quietly. Where possible give your child things to listen for and things to do, eg, while you are reading him/her a story.

### 6. Play turn-taking games with your child

Children with attention difficulties often struggle to take turns. Encourage simple turn taking games to develop their 'waiting time', eg, rolling a ball back and forth, taking turns in games such as building a tower or Pop Up Pirate.