

# Activities and games to improve listening skills



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## What is the difference between hearing and listening?

**Hearing is the ability to detect sounds** with your ears and we have no conscious control over it. Listening is something you consciously choose to do and it requires concentration. **We need to pay attention to what we can hear in order to listen.** You will have experienced someone talking to you while you are concentrating on something else. You may hear that someone is saying something but have not listened so you don't know what has been said.

Listening is more difficult in noisy places such as in a loud pub or at a party because we have to concentrate more. Try and **reduce background noise at home** to make it easier for your child to listen. For example, turn off the TV / radio, move away from the dishwasher or washing machine.

## Why do some children have poor listening skills?

**Children who have a history of fluctuating and/or temporary hearing loss, e.g. from glue ear or recurrent ear infections, will have to concentrate harder in order to listen.** Sometimes these children may become tired from concentrating hard and "switch off". If they have had hearing problems for a while they may switch off more frequently and over time this can result in poor listening skills. Other children have poor listening skills for a variety of reasons, such as having a short attention span.

## How can I help improve my child's listening skills?

Using your child's name helps get his or her attention specifically and lets them know you are about to share important information. Get down to your child's level so you can hear and see each other better, both of which improve listening. Say their name again and wait until your eyes meet. At that moment you'll know they are paying attention and focussing on what you are saying. Your child is ready to listen.

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be a better listener. Sometimes children need practice to improve their listening skills and the best way to practice is by playing games. There are lots of activities and games you can use at home to help improve listening skills. Here are a selection, in no particular order, for different age groups and children with different interests. The most important thing is to make these activities and games fun so your child enjoys them.



## **Activities and Games**

### **Read stories together**

Read to your child on a regular basis. Ask questions about the story and objects on the page to encourage them to listen to what you are reading. Ask your child to predict what will happen next. Or read a short story and ask your child to re-tell it.

### **What can I hear?**

Ask your child to close their eyes for a few seconds and ask them to repeat or say what they can hear. Alternatively, make various noises behind them (e.g. rattle some keys) and ask them to guess what it was.

### **Count the word or sounds**

Read a paragraph and ask your child to count the number of times they hear a particular word (e.g. "a", "the"). Alternatively ask them to make a sound (e.g. push a buzzer) every time they hear the word.

Read a list of words and ask your child to count the number of words with a certain initial consonant, or vowel sound or combination of sounds e.g. "st" in "stair", and "past". Or read a list of words with more than one syllable and ask your child to count how many syllables e.g. ice cream(2), railway bridge (3), cushion (2).

### **Simon says**

Play this traditional game when your child must do what "Simon says" e.g. "Simon says put your hands in the air". However, if you don't say "Simon says" in front of the instruction they must not do it. See if you can catch them out.

### **Find the teddy**

Hide teddy (or another toy) whilst your child is not looking. Then give them a set of instructions to find teddy. e.g. "go into your bedroom and look under the bed". You can make these instructions more or less complex depending on your child's age and level of understanding.

### **Rhyming words**

Ask your child to say a word which rhymes with one you say.

### **Copy me**

Tap a rhythm on a drum or table top, or clap a rhythm and ask your child to repeat it.

### **Story chain**

Start telling a story by saying one or two sentences. Ask your child to make up the next sentence, then take it in turns to make up the next sentence until you have finished the story.

### **Draw the description**

Explain an object or person in detail to your child and then ask them to draw it / them (e.g. a boy with a big nose and curly hair). You could draw the picture too and then compare what you have drawn. You can make the game more difficult by using more detailed descriptions and adding colours.

### **Finish my line / fill in the missing word**

Read the beginning of a sentence and ask your child to finish it. You can use popular children's songs, rhymes or every day phrases (e.g. "Twinkle, twinkle, little .... "). Or read a sentence with a word missing and ask your child to provide a suitable word to fill the gap.

Bring out one of your child's most well loved books and read it aloud, but pause at key points and let your child say the word that comes next. Or read the book and purposefully change key details and see if they notice.

### **Find the Object**

Set up a random assortment of items on a table or on the floor. Give your child details about which object you'd like them to go and get for you. (e.g. Please bring me something that is yellow. Can you give me the big teddy?)

### **Silly sentences**

Read a short paragraph out loud with one "silly sentence" which clearly does not belong to the paragraph, somewhere in the middle. Ask your child to shout out when they hear the silly sentence.

### **Detailed descriptions**

Start describing an object, place or person and ask your child to complete the description (e.g. Grandma has short white hair, wears glasses and .....")

### **Listening walk**

Go for a walk and listen for different sounds, (e.g. a bird singing, an aeroplane) then use these sounds to draw a picture or write a poem.

### **Odd one out**

Say a list of words where one is different, (e.g. dog, cat, biscuit, hamster). Start with three words and gradually increase in number. Ask your child to identify the odd one out.

### **Shopping game**

Put a number of different items at one end of the room. Give your child a bag and ask them to get two named items for you.

### **Which animal?**

Get your child to sit on a seat facing away from you and gather some of their favourite toy animals. Using funny voices have each animal describe itself until your child can guess what animal it is.

Have the child sit with their back to you, Make different animal sounds and have your child guess what animal makes that sound. Another way of playing this game is to hand your child two animal toys or pictures of animals, and then ask them to point to the animal that makes that particular sound. Alternatively give your child three pictures of animals or plastic toy animals, and have them listen to two animal sounds that you make. Then, ask your child to identify which animal did not make any sound.

**Cook together**

Find a recipe, read the instructions out loud, and let your child do the measuring, mixing, stirring and pouring.

**Directions and obstacle course**

Give your child a two step direction, (e.g. hop to the fridge and jump back to the chair). When your child can do a two step instruction with ease, increase the difficulty by adding another step. (e.g. jump to the tree, run to the swing, then come and give me a hug).

Give your child verbal instructions to get through a series of obstacles set up in the room or in the garden / park (e.g. crawl under the chair and over the cushion and around the table).

**Counting carefully**

Ask your child to count aloud as you drop objects into a container. Then ask your child to tell you the number or repeat the actions you have performed. Once they are able to do this by saying out loud, ask them to count silently.

**Soft or loud**

Make soft versus loud sounds using different objects, such as cars, and have your child state if the sound they heard was soft or loud.

**I spy with my little eye**

Describe different objects in the room, and have your child guess what they are.

**Green light, red light**

Have your child perform some actions, or use toy cars to play this game. When your child hears red, they need to stop the activity and start over when they hear green.

**Have conversations about things your child is interested in**

This gives your child a chance to engage in a real conversation, practicing both speaking and listening.

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