

Attention & Listening Skills

Attention and listening skills are the foundation skills for successful language development and learning. An increasing number of children are starting their Reception Year with delayed attention and listening skills. Delayed attention and listening skills are also a common feature of children with impairments in other areas (e.g. language impairments, ADHD, global developmental delay, children with glue ear).

Explicitly teaching attention and listening skills to the whole class will support all children with the skills they need, in order to engage in and access the curriculum.

Like many skills, attention and listening is acquired in an identified pattern. Children pass through distinct stages in their development of these skills.

- Level 1 (0-1 years): Child is easily distracted by things he hears or sees in his environment. By nine months, shared attention has developed. This is where parent and child share a focus on the same object. It coincides with starting to use pointing.
- Level 2 (1-2 years): Child can focus on something that he chooses, but finds it difficult to follow direction from an adult. Attention is single channelled. This means that the child can only take in information from one modality (listening, hearing, touch/manipulation) at a time, so the child can listen or do, but not do both. The child may appear to be ignoring you, but is likely to be engrossed in what he is doing.
- Level 3 (2-3 years): Attention is single channelled. With adult assistance, the child can shift his attention from what he is doing, to what the adult is talking about. This means that your child needs to stop what he is doing before he can listen to you.
- Level 4 (3-4 years): Attention continues to be single channelled but the child can switch between doing something and listening without adult assistance.
- Level 5 (4-5 years): It is not until this stage that attention becomes two channelled. This means that the child can be busy doing a task but be able to listen to someone else at the same time. This is an important skill for school.
- Level 6 (5-6 years) : Listening is now well established and sustained. The child is able to integrate information from the different modalities of looking, listening and touch/manipulation.

Reference: Reynell, 1977, & Cooke, J., and D. Williams. (1987)