

SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY

ATTENTION AND LISTENING

The aim is to increase your child's listening ability. This does not mean he cannot hear – listening and hearing are two very different things! We all know that we can be sitting with the TV on and hear the talking, but if someone asks us about it later, we may not have been listening at all and cannot answer.

This ability – to “switch off” our listening (and also to “switch it on”) is a skill that develops in childhood. Very young children can only pay attention to whatever is “dominant” in the situation – e.g. they are playing and hear a loud noise and turn to it or are distracted by a pretty picture.

Children develop their attention and listening skills until they are able to be controlled by adults or are able themselves to control this “switching” on and off without constantly being distracted.

As their level of attention develops, so does the length of time they can spend on one activity – their concentration span.

So – if your child can hear, why are these things – concentration span, level of attention and listening skills so important?

Unless children have some control over these, they will not be learning enough language from everyday situations when people around them are talking. Children spend much of the early part of their lives listening to other children and adults and learning from them (vocabulary, speech sounds, etc). This is how we learn to talk – no one sits down and “teaches” us how to speak!

So you can see that if a child is constantly flitting from one activity to another, he is not going to learn so much speech and language.

Here are some ideas of activities to help your child's attention and listening skills:

Try and make sure that when you play them you are in a room with as few distractions as possible.

1. Ready, steady Go! Games

- e.g. build a tower and knock it down
push a car to each other across the floor
post a brick into a box etc.

The point is that your child must wait until you have said "go" before he can carry out the game. As you improve at this activity – gradually lengthen the time span between "steady" and "go", so that your child must wait a few seconds.

2. Noisy Games

Put out 3 "noise makers", e.g. squeaky toy, spoon to bang in cup, rattle, two bricks to bang together. Play with these and make the noises. Then your child must cover his eyes and listen while you make a noise, then open his eyes and find the one you used.

(you can expand on this by stopping and listening to noises as you go about your daily routine, e.g. the noises you make while washing up!)

3. Hiding Games

- a) You hide, e.g. a sweet in a little box, place this in a slightly bigger box and so on up to 3 or 4 boxes, while your child watches. He must then open all the boxes to find it!

(You could also use Russian dolls, interlocking cups, etc.).

- b) You hide, e.g. 3 or 4 toys/objects around the room while your child watches. Talk aloud while you do this, e.g.: "I'm going to hide teddy under the chair and the cup on the table", etc.

Then you sit down together in the middle of the room and you say "Find me the". He must listen and then run and fetch it.

Any games like these are very good for helping your child's attention control to develop.

Activities like drawing, painting, jigsaws and formboards, etc., are all good for concentrating!

Do not expect your child to concentrate for long – perhaps only a minute at a time or even less at first!

Short, frequent sessions are best.