



Child Development / Cognitive Development

Listening Skills



Dear Debi,

I care for 3 pre-schoolers who love to talk, but don't always listen to each other. They also have a hard time following directions, which can be frustrating. Can I teach listening skills the way I teach language skills?

– **Jackie**, Sherman Oaks, CA

Debi's Tips



Debi Gutierrez

Host

- Begin talking to kids early on
- Use activities, games and music
- Model good listening skills

Expert Advice



Marsha Newstat

Early childhood
development specialist

Listening skills are very important because they help children learn how to develop language skills. Studies have shown that babies can hear from as early as inside the womb. When they are born, it's important to help infants continue to develop listening skills for them to continue learning and developing.

Listening skills are the ability of children to hear and interpret information delivered orally. It requires children to understand, retain information and respond to it.

Babies learn about language from listening and watching the way we communicate with them and with others. Babies listen to our vocal intonations and inflections; they watch our facial expressions. The more they see and hear, the better it will be for their language development. It's important for us to talk with babies all the time. Make eye contact with them when you speak and use facial expressions to help them learn.

Toddlers develop listening skills from interactions with us and with other children. They will begin to link certain words with their meanings or a particular action. It's good to converse with them and ask them questions so they learn to listen and start to respond to what you are saying. I like to repeat what children say so that they know that I am listening to them and that I am interested in what they have to say.

Preschoolers who have been conversed with regularly throughout their lives should be able to demonstrate listening skills that are more complex. For instance, if you ask

preschoolers to do three things in a row, such as “Can you please go into the bathroom, pick up your shoes, and bring me your red truck?”, they will have a greater ability to follow these types of directions and are able to carry on conversations that involve listening skills and language skills. I encourage one-on-one conversation with each child, no matter what age they are.

As adults, it’s important for us to model good communication skills. Kids learn from seeing how we interact and will pick up on what we demonstrate. Providers should make eye contact when they speak with children. Child Care providers should have very animated facial expressions during their conversations with kids and they should give children their full attention when they speak. In reality, kids learn to listen by using a lot of their senses. They watch, listen and observe your voice, facial expression and movement to take in information and learn from it. Remember, they will also gain good reasoning skills and a sense of self-worth while developing these skills.

If a child has problems listening, there could be either a medical issue or a developmental issue. The best thing to do is begin observing and documenting what you notice about the child’s behavior and then speak with the parents to find out if they have noticed similar behaviors at home. If the parents say that they have also been concerned, you should partner with the family to find a solution together. Whether the child has medical needs or a developmental delay, I suggest that child care providers talk to parents to check with a medical professional pediatrician, nurse or an early intervention service to get their child screened.

Child Care provider Comments



Mechelle

Family child care provider for 4 years

Doing exercises with kids is a great way to develop listening skills. During circle time, for example, I’ll have them close their eyes and have them envision their favorite ice cream. I tell them not to tell me, but instead to wait until I call their name before they tell me what their ice cream flavor is. They must listen carefully for their names while at the same time remember what their flavor is. I also like to play the game “Simon Says” because it really gets them listening to what to do next, but it’s also fun for them to play. I like using these types of games to sharpen their listening skills because they really teach kids how to focus.



Rosalind

Child care provider for 8 years

As parents and child care providers, I think it’s important to model good listening skills to our kids. For example, when my grandkids want to talk to me, I stop what I’m doing and I listen to what they have to say. I make eye contact and I show with my expression that I am listening and interested in what they have to say. I give them my full attention and I think that demonstrates the right way to listen to others.



Diane Ferguson

Child care provider for 3 years

I think it’s important for kids to have listening skills so that they learn to interact not only with other kids, but with adults as well. It’s the first step for them to really learn communication skills. I try to get kids to develop their listening skills during story time. Many times I read part of a story and then stop and ask the kids about what just happened in the story. That way they know that they should listen and follow along to what we are doing.

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