



How to Get Kids to Listen

*“Getting Kids to Listen* is an essential tool for parents and teachers. It is practical and the vital advice it offers is useful and accessible.”

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## LISTENING TOOLS & TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS



**“Good listening is about teaching responsibility and other essential developmental skills.”**

### Introduction

Most parents are used to repeating themselves.

*Use your fork, not your hands when you eat. I said, use your fork. We eat with utensils, not our hands. Fork!*

*Please remember to brush your teeth. Brush your teeth. Did you brush your teeth? Why didn't you brush your teeth when I asked you to? Teeth!*

Parents vary in their style, strategy, patience level and tone but most likely if you are a parent you share the similar challenge of having to continually repeat directions to your children.

Getting children to listen can be difficult. Unlike hearing which is reflexive (we hear noises when we sleep), listening requires effort. Listening is learned. It is strategic.

One of parents' many responsibilities is to teach children good listening skills.

### What does it mean to have good listening skills?

- Good listening develops awareness.
- Good listening helps one become a problem solver.
- Good listening increases understanding.
- Good listening develops a capacity for empathy.
- Good listening teaches respect.
- Good listening teaches responsibility.
- Good listening fosters independence.

Good listening is far more extensive than having your children follow your directions. Following directions is simply the starting point. A main goal of parenting is to teach children to be responsible and self-directed so they can become independent adults. Good listening is about teaching responsibility and other essential developmental skills. Good listening is necessary in order to become a good communicator, which is a valuable life skill.

The following pages provide parents and educators with a variety of listening techniques, skills, suggestions and games to help children develop effective listening skills. These ideas are meant to be just as valuable for parents and educators as they are for children, as our goal is to provide you with tools to help you do your job better, and for you to enjoy the process more!

### What you will learn from this ebook

#### How to Get Kids to Listen

The purpose of this ebook is to provide you - educators and parents - with actionable and accessible tools to help children develop effective listening skills.

The more tools that at your disposal to successfully get kids to listen, the greater likelihood that you will engage in productive communication with them.

#### In this ebook you will learn how you - the adult - can improve your listening skills

##### You will learn the following:

- *Paying FULL attention is critical to listening effectively.*
- *Acknowledging your child's feelings with simple one word responses makes them feel valued and teaches the value of empathy.*
- *You will learn how to identify your child's feelings with a name.*
- *Naming your child's feelings makes them feel supported and respected and teaches them how to problem solve independently.*
- *You will learn how to create a wish fulfillment, known as a “dream,” with your child when he can't get what he wants.*
- *Dreaming with your child teaches him how to find alternatives and effectively work through his upset on his own.*
- *Acknowledging, dreaming and naming negative feelings teach your child that it is acceptable to have troubled feelings.*
- *Listening for both content and for meaning is essential to effective listening.*
- *You will learn how to listen deeply for the feelings below the surface, and learn how to effectively address them.*
- *You will learn how to listen reflectively, the process where the listener paraphrases the speaker, and thus ensures effective listening where the listener truly understands and respects what the speaker is saying.*
- *That subtle facial expressions and body language are important in showing genuine interest.*
- *Asking open ended questions promotes conversation and helps improve speaking and listening skills for children.*
- *Expressing feelings through art is an effective way to get kids to diffuse emotion and work through a problem.*

### Strategies to Get Kids to Listen

#### 1. Explaining Actions is Key to Inspiring Listening

- When you set the stage by explaining the what and the why, children are more likely to feel valued and connected to why they are doing what they are doing.

#### 2. Define Expectations for Behavior

- When you explain what you expect of children, they are more likely to feel accountable and committed to follow through accordingly.

#### 3. Varying your Tone

- Changing your tone is an effective means to prevent students from zoning out.
- It is especially effective in engaging youngsters.

#### 4. Visuals (maps, globes, diagrams, videos)

- The use of colorful and different visuals helps to keep students focused.

#### 5. Audio

- Using recordings or music when applicable to a topic draws students in.

#### 6. Storytelling

- The use of parables is a timeless and compelling way to attract and maintain attention.

#### 7. Catchy Phrases

- Rhythmic phrases that are used to signal attention help calm restless youngsters (pre-school to 2nd grade).

#### 8. Personalize Lessons

- Using student's names to personalize lessons is a useful tool to focus them.

#### 9. Invite Participation

- Assigning small group projects and giving kids jobs gives them a sense of duty and ownership.
- When children feel responsible and accountable they are often inspired to pay attention and succeed at the task.

#### 10. Satisfying Needs

- Fun has been identified as one of the five basic needs that drive all human behavior.
- Infusing fun, when appropriate, creates a fulfilling classroom environment.
- Students will likely be motivated to listen if they feel their needs are being met.

#### 11. Change Locations

- Conducting lessons outside or in a different location, like the gym or cafeteria, should help to energize students. Learning in the same place can be static.

#### 12. Teacher's Proximity

- Move around the classroom when instructing.
- Students will be on the alert to pay attention as they won't know when you will be right in front of them.

### 13. Instruct them to Focus

- Get on their level and look into their eyes (for preschool - early elementary age students).
- “David I need your ears” (or) “Audrey I need your eyes.”

### 14. Say it in Writing

- An effective method to get kids to pay attention after repeating directives too many times.

### 15. Reduce Emotion in One Sentence

- "When you can speak as calmly as me, I am happy to listen to you," is a simple phrase that helps an emotional child to diffuse his upset so he can productively talk through an issue with you.

### **In this ebook You will Learn Listening Games, as Well as Strategies to Get Your Kids to Talk at Dinner**

- We'll introduce you to simple listening games for all ages to conduct in the classroom and at home.
- You will get step-by-step directions for how to play these listening games.
- No props are needed - just eager listeners.
- And you'll get tips on how to draw out tight lipped children at the dinner table!

Now it's time to start listening!

# DEMONSTRATING EFFECTIVE LISTENING IS ESSENTIAL TO TEACHING EFFECTIVE LISTENING



“Accepting your children's feelings is an important part of making them feel valued.”

It goes without saying that modeling the behavior we want in our children is an integral part of parenthood.

Illustrate effective listening skills in the following ways:

**1. Show them how well you listen:** simply staring into their eyes and paying full attention to what they are saying shows them you value what they are saying.

**Here are suggestions to pay full attention:**

- Put down your cell phone.
- Turn off the Tv.
- Stop cooking dinner for a few moments.

**Remove yourself from any distractions.**

- Take a seat or crouch down to their level.
- Listen with full attention

The following concepts and examples are adapted from “*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids will Talk*” by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, Avon Books, 1980.

It is worth noting that the author of this ebook is a huge fan of their work. A mother of three, she often uses Faber and Mazlish’s techniques with her own children and she finds them highly effective. “*How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*” was a powerful resource that led this ebook author to write about ways to get kids to listen.

**2. Acknowledge your child's feelings:** accepting your children's feelings is an important part of making them feel valued. It demonstrates empathic listening.

**Parents often deny their children's feelings when they are distressed:**

*Child: Mommy I'm thirsty.*

*Parent: No you aren't, you just had a juice box.*

*Child: But I am still thirsty (whining louder)*

*Parent: Well I am not giving you another sugary juice and I have nothing else. You will just have to wait until we get home!*

**Instead of this parent's "no" response, an alternative could be to simply acknowledge their feelings with a word or two.**

*Child: Mommy, I'm thirsty.*

*Parent: Mmm, I see. So you are still thirsty. I am happy to give you water.*



*Child: I don't want water, I want juice.*

*Parent: You really want another juice. You are welcome to water or you can wait for milk when we get home in a few minutes.*

It is entirely possible that the child continued to ask for juice despite the mother's attempts to acknowledge his feelings, but the mother demonstrated empathic listening and she truly heard him. She didn't discredit his feelings. She didn't give in. She gave him choices and the responsibility to make his own decision.

**3. Identify the feeling:** naming the feeling is another way to acknowledge and validate it.

**Parents may want to push their children's bad feelings away but that doesn't help children work through them:**

*Child: Mom my goldfish died. He was alive last night. (tears)*

*Parent: Don't be sad honey. It's ok. We can replace her.*

*Child: It's not fair. (more tears)*

*Parent: We'll get you another one. Please stop crying.*

*Child: I don't want another one. (sobbing)*

*Parent: Please stop crying! We'll get a new one.*

**When a parent identifies or names the feeling, children are likely to work through their disappointment:**

*Child: My goldfish died. He was alive last night.*

*Parent: That's really upsetting.*

*Child: I loved him so much. He was my buddy.*

*Parent: Yes you did. It hurts to lose a buddy.*

*Child: I decorated his bowl and took great care of him.*

*Parent: You took a lot of pride in him and his fish bowl.*

*Child: Yeah, I really loved having him.*

**Parents may hesitate to name a feeling for concern they will make it worse, but when a child feels the parent understands her, she is likely to feel supported.**

**Acknowledging your child's inner struggles is especially comforting to her and it helps her work through her uncomfortable feelings. It helps her recognize that it is ok to feel badly.**

**Troubled feelings are acceptable. This enables her to come to terms with the discomfort and move on.**

**4. Dream with your child:** Instead of feeling like you are saying the same old, "no I don't have it" or "I can't help you with that right now," *dreaming* is an alternative method to working through a discomfoting feeling.

**When adults provide sensible explanations for why children can't have something, children usually complain loudly. The more sensible their explanations, the louder children tend to push back.**

*Child: I want homemade pancakes for breakfast.*

*Parent: We are all out of pancake mix.*

*Child: I want them now. Right now!*

*Parent: I just told you we don't have the ingredients. How about frozen waffles?*

*Child: I want pancakes now!*

*Parent: Stop yelling. We don't have any.*

**Imagining with your child may help diffuse frustration and make him feel someone is on his side.**

*Child: I want homemade pancakes for breakfast.*

*Parent: I wish I had some mix or ingredients to make them.*

*Child: I really want pancakes now.*

*Parent: I hear that you really want them.*

*Child: I wish I had them now.*

*Parent: I wish I could wave a wand and make pancake mix land in our kitchen.*

*Child: Well maybe I will have some frozen waffles instead.*

The above examples and concepts aim to teach your children effective listening skills while providing valuable communication tools for parents.

By denying children's feelings, parents are doing them a disservice. Acknowledging their struggles shows children their parents respect and value them. When parents show empathy, children learn the value of it. Empathy must be seen as sincere. When children feel that parents are feeling with them and putting themselves in their shoes, then they will feel that parents are on their side.

Giving children the freedom to express their feelings and deal with them allows them to grow. Listening in these ways teaches children to take responsibility for their feelings and to try to work them out through problem-solving.

### EFFECTIVE LISTENING



“Listening in these ways teaches children to take responsibility for their feelings and to try to work them out through problem-solving.”

Before we get into specific strategies for ways to get children to listen effectively, we're going to introduce the concept of *Active Listening*, a term coined by [Richard Farson](#), who renamed it that from [Reflective Listening](#), which was a concept invented by [Carl Rogers](#). *Active listening is the baseline for developing effective listening skills.*

Renowned psychologist Carl Rogers, co-authored a notable article with psychologist Richard E. Farson in 1957 entitled "[Communicating in Business Today](#),"<sup>1</sup> which details the skills and techniques required in active listening. The quotes below are extracted from this article and are included here as the author feels they clearly explain the value of active listening.

Please note that [Dr. Thomas Gordon](#) popularized and introduced the term "Active Listening" to the masses via [P.E.T. \(Parent Effectiveness Training\)](#). The term "active listening" is loosely used and as our goal is to respect the late Dr. Gordon's definition of the term, from here on we will refer to it as "effective listening," not "active listening." We have replaced the word "active" with "effective" when applicable.

- *"By consistently listening to a speaker, you are conveying the idea that: 'I'm interested in you as a person, and I think that what you feel is important. I respect your thoughts, and even if I don't agree with them, I know that they are valid for you. I feel sure that you have a contribution to make. I'm not trying to change you or evaluate you. I just want to understand you. I think you're worth listening to, and I want you to know that I'm the kind of a person you can talk to.'"*<sup>2</sup>
- *"Not the least important result of listening is the change that takes place within the listener himself. Besides providing more information than any other activity, listening builds deep, positive relationships and tends to alter constructively the attitudes of the listener. Listening is a growth experience."*<sup>3</sup>

### What is Effective Listening?

Rogers and Farson recommend these [listening techniques](#) which require time and practice and typically do not come naturally to most people.

- **[Listen for Total Meaning](#):** a message has two parts: the content and the feeling underneath it and active listening means listening on both levels.

### Example of Not Listening for Meaning

Joey shrugs his shoulders while handing in his math assignment a day late and tells the teacher it was late because he didn't remember his times table sheet. He left it at school and couldn't complete the assignment without it. The teacher responded by stating that she expects him to remember his sheet and that she explained to the class that they could find the information on

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<sup>1</sup> Carl R. Rogers & Richard E. Farson excerpt from ACTIVE LISTENING Communicating in Business Today R.G. Newman, M.A. Danzinger, M. Cohen (eds) D.C. Heath & Company, 1987  
[http://www.go-get.org/pdf/Rogers\\_Farson](http://www.go-get.org/pdf/Rogers_Farson)

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the web if they ever left their time table sheets at school. He could have completed the assignment on time without the sheet from school. This teacher is only listening to the content, the surface meaning of the message.

### Example of Listening For Deeper Meaning

Instead of the above response, the teacher states, "How did you do with the times tables?" She picks up in Joey's body language that he was struggling. Joey states, "Well ok. I found myself having to do them over several times as I wasn't sure I had it right." "Tell me more about where you were stuck. I am glad you are telling me this Joey. We're going to do some work on this together and for the future I do expect you to turn your work in on time," she explains. The teacher listened to Joey for the total meaning and she sensed that he was struggling. But she didn't let him off the hook just because he had a tough time. She made him accountable while also respecting the fact that he was having difficulty.

Respond to Feelings: the listener needs to be sensitive to what the speaker is truly feeling. The listener needs to be genuinely interested in what the speaker is saying.

### Example of Not Listening for Feelings

Samantha comes home from school and tells her mom that she had a bad day because there was nothing to do at recess. There was no one to play with. Mom is cutting vegetables for dinner and stops what she is doing. "What do you mean? I thought you liked to play in the playground with Amy and Susy and do your spy game?" says Mom. "Well I didn't feel like it today and there was nothing else to do," mopes Samantha. Mom says, "Well that is silly. I know there are some many choices you have, kick ball, hop scotch, monkey bars. And there are other kids to play with besides Amy and Susy." Mom goes back to cutting her vegetables and Samantha walks away, feeling dismissed.

### Example of Listening for Feelings

Instead of the response below Mom says, "Sounds like a frustrating recess. Tell me more about what happened on the playground." "Well Amy and Susy asked these three other girls to join our spy game and we split up into teams. Amy and Susy were together with this girl Allie and I wasn't on their team. It was a stupid game, says Samantha." "Sounds like you didn't like being on a different team," says Mom. "Yeah, I really don't want to play with those other girls again and they didn't even ask me how I felt. They just asked them to join us," says Samantha. Samantha goes on, "I think I'll find some other girls to play with tomorrow. I haven't played with Molly and Becky in a while. Maybe I will give the monkey bars a try again. A bunch of the girls are doing a monkey bar contest." By listening sincerely to Samantha and by connecting to her feelings of disappointment Mom is genuinely listening. She doesn't solve her problem or say too much. She just listens with real interest and takes the time to give Samantha her full attention. And Samantha worked through the issue on her own.

- **Listening is Reflective:** active listening is also referred to as "reflective listening." In this process the listener reflects back his understanding of what a person says to him. This is meant to confirm that the listener understood the message. In this process if the listener doesn't understand the message, the speaker can correct him. This communicates the listener's acceptance of the person's thoughts and emotions. Instead of repeating back what the listener said, it is most effective to paraphrase the message in fewer words. Parroting back the message does not connote sincerity and understanding.

### Example of Not Listening Reflectively

At bedtime, Peter pleads that he doesn't want to go to his room.

Peter, (whining) *"I am scared to be alone in my room. I don't want to go to bed!"*

Mom, *"What are you afraid of Peter? You sleep on your own every night."*

Peter, (still whining) *"But I am really scared." "I don't want to go to bed!"*

Mom, *"Peter that is so silly. I don't understand what the problem is. You are really scared of what?"*

Peter, (teary and whining) *"Of Cookie Monster and Big Bird. They are going to get me."*

Mom, *"You are scared of Cookie Monster and Big Bird. They are not scary."*

Peter, (still teary) *"Yes they are. I am so scared."*

Mom, *"You are scared of Cookie Monster and Big Bird. They are friendly, not scary. You will be fine."*

Peter, (crying loudly) *"I don't want to go to my room. I am so scared!"*

Mom, *"You don't want to go to your room and you are really scared. Everything will be fine Peter. You sleep in your room every night. This is silly."*

In the above example, mom dismisses Peter's anxious feelings and she repeats back what he says without providing leading questions to guide him to problem solve. She doesn't attempt to listen with genuine interest. She doesn't respect his emotions and thoughts and she doesn't allow Peter to voice them without judgment. Peter is stuck and can't move on and mom is not helping him get out of the cycle.

### Example of Reflective Listening

Peter, (whining) *"I am scared to be alone in my room. I don't want to go to bed!"*

Mom, *"You're scared Peter. What is bothering you tonight?"*

Peter, (still whining) *"I am afraid of Cookie Monster and Big Bird."*

Mom, *"What is scary to you about Cookie Monster and Big Bird?"*

Peter, (no longer whining) *"They are going to get me. I think they are hiding in my closet."*

Mom, *"Sounds like you think Cookie Monster and Big Bird are not friendly monsters. On Sesame Street all the monsters are meant to be friendly. What is it about these two?"*

Peter, *"Well Cookie Monster is always eating things and his voice is scary. I am afraid he will eat me. And Big Bird is so big that I am afraid he'll just crush me in my bed. He is so much bigger than me."*

Mom, *"Sounds like you think Cookie Monster and Big Bird don't like little boys."*

Peter, *"Yeah, I don't think they do like little boys. I think they are big and scary."*

Mom, *"Hey Peter how about we read some of your Sesame Street books and you can see how they treat little boys in the books."*

Peter, *"Ok that sounds good."*

Imagine that Peter and his mom read some books and talked more about how Cookie Monster and Big Bird behave toward children. Peter may still be scared after reading, but his mom has allowed him to voice his scared feelings with acceptance. She is providing him with the space to communicate his feelings and she is helping him to work through them. She is teaching him also that it is ok to be scared. This dialogue demonstrates reflective listening and reinforces the concepts mentioned earlier about acknowledging and naming feelings.

### Other Suggestions for Effective Listening

- **Body Language:** The way we sit or stand and our facial expressions do send messages to the speaker about how interested we are in hearing what s/he has to say.
- Refrain from folding arms as that sends a negative message that the listener is closed off and perhaps not interested.
- Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.

- Responding with yeses, head nods and raised eyebrows illustrate deep interest.
- **Ask Questions:** Asking children to provide more details is a way to help them improve both their speaking and listening skills.
- Ask open ended questions such as, "Tell me more about what happened at recess..."
- Avoid questions with yes and no answers, "Did you like Spanish today?"
- Ask them to provide an example: "Can you please give me an example of ways you think your teacher is not fair."
- **Have your Child Illustrate his Feelings:** This can be an effective way for younger children to communicate, especially when they are stuck in an emotional meltdown.
- *For example:* Natalie is upset that she can't go with her mom and big sister to the movies because it is past her bedtime. Mom tries to listen reflectively but Natalie is too emotional and it is not effective for them to engage in circuitous dialogue. Mom suggests that Natalie draw a picture of how she is feeling. This gives Natalie a break from focusing on being upset and now she can productively channel her emotions toward drawing, a relaxing and peaceful activity. When Natalie returns to mom with her artwork, they can talk about what Natalie's picture represents and if Mom thinks it would be effective they could talk about her upset. Or Mom can just talk about the picture with Natalie and move on from there.

Using art to express feelings doesn't have to be reserved for communicating negative emotions. Encouraging children to draw is a vehicle to share positive feelings as well as anecdotes of a child's day, such as details about his day at preschool. This is simply an alternative to communicating through words and it works well to demonstrate genuine listening skills.

## Talk So Kids will Listen: 15 Ways to Capture and Hold Attention

The previous pages provided tools for you - parents and educators - to get kids to listen effectively through improving your own listening skills. If adults are equipped with tips to communicate more productively, the hope is that we'll create more opportunities to engage in respectful and successful communication with children. But sometimes it is tough to just get their attention. Below are ideas for ways to get kids to focus so we can engage them in effective listening.

**1. Explain Actions** - as educators and parents, when you explain why you are doing something and what exactly it is you are doing, it helps to put the task into context. Children are more likely to listen if they understand why they are doing certain things. Understanding the **what** and **why** helps children feel valued and connected to what they are doing. The more connected they feel, the more likely they are to listen.

- Classroom Example: "This week we are reading books and doing several activities that focus on freedom and justice in honor of Martin Luther King week."
- Home Example: "I am asking you to step down from that stool because you may get hurt. My job is to keep you safe."

**2. Define Expectations** - describing expectations holds children accountable which *should* make them more likely to pay attention.

- Classroom Example: "I expect everyone to be respectful and quiet when we have visitors in the classroom. We are lucky to have this special historian present on World War I this afternoon."
- Home Example: "Please remember that we are going to a library which is a quiet place. I expect you to keep your voices low and do not run around."



**3. Tone** – Changing your tone in your voice is one way to prevent students from zoning out. Youngsters may be more inclined to listen when you raise and lower your voice and speak with emotion. When reading books to the very young it helps to speak emphatically and with varying tones to attract and keep their attention.

**4. Visuals** – The use of visuals helps to keep students focused. Colorful maps, large globes and diagrams are examples of visuals to spread throughout the class. Videos and images on a projector are ways to draw attention.

**5. Audio** - Using recordings or music when applicable to the topic, is another way to attract attention.

**6. Storytelling** - the use of parables is highly effective in drawing students in.

- For the Classroom: Ask students to draw their own conclusions from the story. This type of inductive teaching encourages students to analyze and synthesize information.
- For Home: Use examples from your own childhood, such as, "I didn't like having jobs to do at home when I was a little girl and I used to trade jobs with my brother and sister. That made it more like a game and it went by faster." Kids love to hear what their parents were like when they were little.

**7. Catchy Phrases** - for younger students (pre-k to 2nd grade) when they get restless or unruly try a catchy rhythmic expression.

- Classroom/Home Example: "I'm closing my eyes and counting to three... and when I open them I will see...everyone sitting quietly... 1....2....3!" and when you "open" your eyes act astonished and say "That is SO magical! Thank you!" and then get back to work.
- Classroom/Home Example: "Clap once if you can hear me. [most kids clap] Clap twice if you can hear me. [all kids clap, and stop talking] Clap three times if you can hear me." This can be easily modified to "If you can hear me put your finger on your nose, etc...."
- Home Example: The above ideas can work well when kids are acting wild during meal times, not responding to requests to clean their toys, brush their teeth, etc. Also, simply clapping loudly and saying in an emphatic tone, "One, two, three, eyes on me," can be an effective way to stop the behavior and focus on the parent.

**8. Personalize Lessons** - whenever possible if you personalize lessons using students' names, they will typically focus.

- Classroom Example, in math, use your students' names in any word problems you create.

**9. Invite Participation** – when teachers actively engage students to participate they will likely pay attention. Making children responsible and accountable often inspires them to want to listen and succeed.

- Classroom Examples: Create teams or group projects, go outside for lessons, and assign jobs and roles to students to help in the classroom.
- Home Example: Hold a weekly family meeting and have kids pick weekly jobs from a job jar. Let them swap jobs if they want. Make part of the meeting about fun, not just chores. For example, invite suggestions from the kids on a family activity to all do together that week. Vote on the activity. It could be something as simple as watching a show together, going for a walk or having a catch outside.

**10. Satisfy Needs** – Renowned psychiatrist [William Glasser](#) has identified **fun** as one of the five basic needs that drives all human behavior. If you want your students to be more motivated to do what you want, (i.e., to listen) infuse fun into your classroom. Students will be more committed to listen when they see their needs being met.

Many students have a need to have fun in active ways such as the need to be noisy and excited.

Rather than suppressing these needs, design an educational activity that fulfills them. If students feel their learning will meet their needs they will be more inclined to work hard and endure less desirable work.

Ask the class to come up with some activities they think are fun and incorporate these activities into your schedule if appropriate and when time permits. Making students feel they are being heard and fulfilling their need for recreation should inspire them to focus.

**11. Change Locations** - take them outside, use a free room like the gym or cafeteria. Mix things up. Don't always teach your lessons in the same place.

**12. Teacher's Proximity** - Move around the classroom when instructing. Students never know when you will be right next to them and that encourages them to pay attention.

**13. Instruct them to Focus** - As you are at their level, looking into their eyes, say, "Jack I need your ears," or "Sally I need your eyes." This is more for preschool and early elementary years.

**14. Say it in Writing** - When you find yourself repeating the same directive to your children, writing it can be an effective way to stir them into action.

Home Example: Your son continues to leave his wet towel on the floor after his shower, despite your repeated demands to hang it up. Write a note, like, "Dear Ike, I get dirty and lonely sitting on your cold floor every night. Can you please hang me up in the bathroom. Love your sad towel."

Home Example: Your kids are playing with their Legos and are making so much noise while you are trying to cook dinner that you can't get much done, despite your repeated demands to play in the den until dinner. Write a note, "Kitchen closed until dinner. Mom will call you when it is ready."

Try drawing a picture to accompany the words for younger kids. They will understand and they should be amused, which will hopefully inspire them to respond to your demands!

**15. Diffuse the Emotion** - When your child is highly emotional, it is virtually impossible to reason with him. He can't listen to you and you can't listen to him.

Try this simple phrase to help your child reduce his charged emotions. This should effectively position him to listen and reason with you.

- "When you can speak as calmly as me, I am happy to listen to you." (or)
- "When you can speak as calmly as me, I am happy to talk with you."

After you make this statement, he is likely to take a brief moment and then tell you that he is calm and ready to talk.



# LISTENING ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL



“Children are more likely to listen if they understand why they are doing certain things.”

Games are a fun and engaging way to promote effective listening. When students are having fun they are more likely to focus without effort. Many of these games can be used as recreational breaks from classroom curriculum, time permitting.

**For Students - K-12** The topics used in these games can be modified for different age groups but the basic structure of these activities are applicable for grades K-12.

## 1. Secret

### Purpose

- Similar to the old fashioned game of "Telephone," the purpose of this game is for each student to whisper a message down the line as accurately as possible.

### What it teaches

- This game teaches students the importance of paying very close attention when someone is speaking.
- It teaches responsibility as students are accountable for accurately delivering a message.
- It acts as a class review of a topic the class is currently learning about.

### Directions

1. The teacher explains to the class that the purpose of this game is to practice excellent listening skills by repeating exactly what she whispers to the next person in line. Everyone is expected to pay close attention and to remain silent until it is his/her turn.
2. The class gathers in a circle.
3. The teacher whispers one sentence to a student. She can make it a statement or a question. She should point out that it is ok if a few words are altered as long as the message is clear and is on point with the statement.

The teacher can ask the class to answer the question/statement at the end of the game as a way to reinforce learning the subject.

The sentence should relate to a topic the class is currently learning about. History and science are subjects that lend themselves well to this game.

- Example: "What is the name of the holiday that Americans celebrate in remembrance of the brave men and women who lost their lives for our country?"
  - Example: "This planet is the closest in distance to the sun. It is often called the morning star."
4. Each student whispers the statement to the person sitting next to him/her.
  5. The last person repeats the sentence to the entire class.
  6. The teacher writes the original sentence on the board.
  7. Teacher asks the class what they thought of the game. What was difficult? What was easy?

8. If time permits, repeat the game with a new phrase and increase the level of difficulty if the earlier round seemed too easy. You can add more sentences to make it more challenging or pick a more complex topic. Invite the class to come up with their own phrases as long as they reflect a current topic discussed in class.

## 2. Share in a Line

### Purpose

- Similar to *Secret*, the goal in this game is to repeat a message accurately. However, the difference is that the speaker who passes down the message is responsible to create the sentence on his own by drawing from a current class topic.

### What it Teaches

- This game teaches students how to clearly process and interpret information.
- It emphasizes the importance of listening fully.
- It bolsters student's knowledge about a current lesson plan.
- It strengthens both listening and speaking skills.
- It teaches accountability.

### Directions

1. The class forms a long line.

2. The teacher picks a topic for the game.

The topic should relate to a current lesson plan.

- For example, if the class is learning about biology and cells, the teacher can say, "make a sentence with 1 fact about cells."
- Students can say things like, "all living beings are made up of cells" or "tissues are part of cells." Have the class name two facts if appropriate or two or more sentences to make it more challenging.

3. Explain that each student at both ends of the line share the sentence(s) with the person next to him and ask each person to pass the message down the line. So there will be two different messages being passed down the line.

4. When the two messages meet up, ask each student who is last to receive the message to rephrase it.

5. Use this as an opportunity to talk about the topic at hand. Ask the class what other facts they know about the subject.

Another way to run this activity is to ask each student at the end of the line to share a short story of no more than three sentences, about any topic.

Or teachers can select a topic related or unrelated to school like tell a 3 sentence story about going to the movies, playing soccer or talk about your favorite book.

### 3. Guess the Word

#### Purpose

- The goal of this game is to guess what word the leader is thinking of without saying the word.

#### What it Teaches

- This game teaches critical thinking skills.
- It reinforces and builds upon student's knowledge about a current class topic.
- It teaches self-control as students are required to refrain from using a word.

#### Directions

1. Pick one child to be the leader.
2. Whisper to the child what the word is that the class is going to guess. Pick a topic related to a subject the class is learning about if you want to reinforce learning.
3. Narrow the answer by giving the class a hint. For example, tell the class the word is a part of the brain that you recently studied in biology.
4. Other students take turns asking questions to the leader.
5. The leader can't use the word in her response.
6. The guessers can't use the word in their questions.
7. For example, if the word is "cerebrum," she can't say the word in her reply. If students ask a question like, "Is this one of three parts of the brain?" the leader can say yes and she should offer details like, "it is the biggest part of the brain." "It is where all of our thinking takes place." But she can't use the word in her answers.
8. The other children take turns asking the leader questions also while not using the word.
9. When a student thinks they know the answer they raise their hand and make a guess.
10. If they are accurate, the game is over, but if they aren't that person is out of the game.
11. Another example, unrelated to a school topic, is to ask the leader a personal question such as, "What month is your birthday in?" The leader will say, "it is in the same month as Halloween" or "It is the month before Thanksgiving." The leader can't say October and neither can those guessing.
12. *Parental suggestion* - This is also a good game for long car rides.

## LISTENING ACTIVITIES FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

These listening games are suitable for the classroom or at home



“ When you speak as calmly as me, I am happy to listen to you. ”

### Create a search game

Game notes:

- This game works inside or outside, such as on a nature walk.
- Ideas for in the classroom - Make the search topic part of a theme the students are working on in class. The example below is based on a harvest theme. As many preschool classrooms are set up with centers or stations, these ideas below are based upon that type of class set up.

### Purpose

- The purpose of this game is for children to find objects that you ask them to look for.

### What it Teaches

- It teaches the importance of being a good listener.
- It boosts memory.
- It strengthens knowledge about a particular topic.
- It teaches classification of objects.

### Directions

1. Assign students in pairs.
2. Ask them to find one item, such as an apple.
3. When they return with the item, ask them to find two items, such as a scarecrow and an ear of corn.
4. When they return with the two items, ask them for three items, such as a leaf, an acorn, and a pine cone.
5. Continue increasing the number of items to search until you think it's enough.

### At Home

1. Ask your child to find one item such as a book.
2. When he returns with the book, ask him to bring back two items such as a toothbrush and a box of cereal.
3. When he returns with those two, ask him to find three items, such as a calculator, a hairbrush and a crayon.
4. Continually ask for different type of items that are located in different rooms. This will make it more challenging for him as he is listening and thinking about where things are located and how objects are organized.
5. Reward him by offering a treat such as that piece of chocolate you asked him to find!

### Mnemonics Game

#### Purpose

- The purpose of this game is for students to create a mnemonic about a topic they are learning about.

#### What it Teaches

- Students learn what a mnemonic is by participating in this activity.
- It helps students build retention about a subject they are learning about.
- It encourages creativity.
- It teaches the importance of good listening.
- It challenges listening and speaking skills.

#### Directions

##### In the classroom

1. Explain to your students what mnemonics are. Mnemonics can be any type of rhyme, story or song or verse to help remember items.
2. Use the example:, "My Very Excellent Mother Just Served Us Nine Pickles" is a mnemonic for remembering the 9 planets. Or "Columbus Sailed the Ocean Blue in 1492," is a mnemonic for remembering this historical event and holiday.
3. Break the class up into small groups (up to 4) students.
4. Ask them to come up with a fun story/phrase mnemonic about a topic that you are focusing on such as a transportation theme.
5. Tell them to use three words that have to do with transportation. Tell them they can make it as silly as they want to.
6. Here is a not so silly example, "Trains travel flat on tracks, planes go high in the sky, and people just get to ride."
7. Encourage the small groups to repeat the story/phrase a few times to make sure they all remember it.
8. Combine the entire class into a circle and have each person from the small group individually share the mnemonic with the class.
9. When each group is finished, ask for volunteers to repeat back one of the phrases they heard.
10. At this point, the class may erupt into laughter if some of the students remembered things a bit differently than the original phrase. Or they may just start laughing because the phrase is silly and funny. Chances are that the funnier the phrase, the more likely the students will be to remember it.

##### At Home

1. Ask your child to come up with a fun story about a daily activity such as what does she need to do to get ready for school.
2. Encourage her to make it funny, such as, "Brush brush brush, my teeth, my hair, the dog. Dress dress dress myself, my bed, my doll, and then eat, eat, eat my cereal, my banana my vitamin!"
3. Or just ask her to make up a mnemonic about any topic she feels like, such as her favorite hobby, favorite book or character. Ask her to provide details about the topic,

such as "Dora's cousin is Diego and they like to go exploring." This calls upon her ability to retain and relay descriptive information. Encourage her to share it with siblings or other family members or friends and see if they can repeat it back.

**Pattern Game** - This is a listening game paired with music and movement, suitable for ages 8-18 months.

### **Purpose**

- To get kids to repeat back what you are doing

### **What it Teaches**

- It teaches good listening and focus.
- It boosts memory.
- It enhances communication skills.
- It encourages rhythm.

### **Directions**

- Clap your hands in a simple pattern or rhythm.
- Have your child repeat it.
- Make your pattern more complex by clapping faster or changing the pattern.
- Have him repeat it.
- Tap your hands on your head or on your legs.
- Clap your hands and tap your head and legs.
- Continually change the pattern until you think your youngster has had enough!

If you think your youngster has a good facility with language, try a version of the above activity by naming your suggestions, such as Simon Says or Mommy Says or Daddy Says. Example: "Mommy says clap your hands like this. Mommy says tap your hands on your legs, Mommy says clap your hands like this and then tap your hands on your legs."

Create your own version with a search theme, such as:

- "Mommy says, throw this juice box in the garbage."
- "Mommy says, bring me that Winnie the Pooh book in the corner of the room."

These "Mommy Says" activities are also good with older children - typically those up to at least age 3 enjoy this listening activity.

### **At the Dinner Table**

Sometimes it can be challenging to get your kids to engage at the dinner table, whether you want them to share details about their school day or just converse with you.

These suggestions encourage sharing information and bring some fun and life to the table.

#### **Question of the Day**

**Goal:** This activity encourages the sharing of information and is especially effective with those youngsters who typically provide you with one word responses!

#### **Directions**

1. Pick a question of the day at dinner such as:
  - "What was your favorite part of the day?"
  - "What made you laugh today?"
  - "What new thing did you learn today that you never knew before?"
  - "What was the most annoying part of your day today?"
2. Have each person around the table answer the question.
3. As a person is answering the question, have him hold a spoon and then pass it to the next person to show whose turn it is.

#### **Start a Silly Story**

**Goal:** This activity is meant to bring some spice and liveliness to dinner time.

#### **Directions**

1. Start a silly story and have each person add a few sentences. Again, have each speaker hold the spoon and pass it around when he is finished talking.
  - For example, start a story with, "A 7 year old boy flew to the moon one day," or, "A 12 year old girl fell in a pile of mud and wound up sinking into a rabbit's burrow."
2. As the story is completed, have each family member recap the story.
3. If your child(ren) are too young to add to the story, ask them to provide specific details by asking questions such as:
  - "What color was the moon? Did he make any friends there? Did he see animals on the moon?"
  - "Who did the girl see in the rabbit burrow?" "What did it feel like for her to be underground?"

### CONCLUSION

We hope this ebook provided you with some valuable tools to improve your own listening and communication skills, as well as that of your children/students. We welcome feedback and ideas on additional listening techniques, strategies, games and tips to enhance listening skills. Thanks for listening!

*By Jennifer Krauss. Jennifer is a mother of three young children ages 2, 5 and 8. She is the Editor for Funderstanding.com. Contact Jennifer at [Jennifer@Funderstanding.com](mailto:Jennifer@Funderstanding.com).*

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## CHECKLISTS

| Communication Checklist   |                |                                   |   |                         |
|---|----------------|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Adults: Are you Listening Effectively?  | Adult's Action | Child's Probable Reaction/Feeling | Potential Insights Learned (Not Learned)  | Reference Page in Ebook |
| Did you put down the phone, blackberry, turn off the tv, stop cooking, remove yourself from all distractions? | YES            | Feels respected and valued        | Models effective listening skills   | p.8                     |
| Did you put down the phone, blackberry, turn off the tv, stop cooking, remove yourself from all distractions? | NO             | Feels disregarded and unimportant | Doesn't illustrate how to listen effectively  | p.8                     |
| Did you give your child focused eye contact?  | YES            | Feels respected and valued        | Models effective listening skills   | p.13                    |
| Did you give your child focused eye contact?  | NO             | Feels disregarded and unimportant | Doesn't illustrate how to listen effectively  | p.13                    |
| Did you crouch down or sit so you could get close to your child's level?                                      | YES            | Feels respected and valued        | Models effective listening skills   | p.8                     |
| Did you crouch down or sit so you could get close to your child's level?                                      | NO             | Feels disregarded and unimportant | Doesn't illustrate how to listen effectively  | p.8                     |
| Did you acknowledge your child's feelings with a simple one or two word response?                             | YES            | Feels heard and supported         | Teaches empathy and responsibility  | p.8                     |
| Did you acknowledge your child's feelings with a simple one or two word response?                             | NO             | Feels dismissed and defeated      | Doesn't help your child work through her problem, doesn't teach the value of empathic listening             | p.8                     |
| Did you identify with your child's upset by giving the feeling a name?  | YES            | Feels acknowledged and validated  | Responsibility, Problem Solving, Independence and the understanding that it is OK to have-negative feelings | p.9                     |

| Communication Checklist   |                |  |   |                         |
|---|----------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| Adults: Are you Listening Effectively?  | Adult's Action | Child's Probable Reaction/Feeling                          | Potential Insights Learned (Not Learned)  | Reference Page in Ebook |
| Did you identify with your child's upset by giving it a name?                                 | NO             | Feels dismissed and defeated                               | Doesn't foster independence and the ability to problem solve, implies that it is not acceptable to have negative feelings | p.9                     |
| Did you dream with your child when s/he expressed deep disappointment and emotion?            | YES            | Feels supported and comforted                              | Problem-solving, empathy and creativity   | p.9                     |
| Did you dream with your child when s/he expressed deep disappointment and emotion?            | NO             | Continues to feel frustrated and stuck in emotional spiral | Doesn't teach how to work through frustration and doesn't model empathic listening  | p.9                     |
| Did you listen deeply - for content and meaning below the surface?                            | YES            | Feels valued, heard and supported                          | Effective and empathic listening skills   | p.11                    |
| Did you listen deeply - for content and meaning below the surface?                            | NO             | Doesn't feel valued, understood or supported               | Doesn't teach effective and empathic listening skills   | p.11                    |
| Did you listen for feelings?  | YES            | Feels supported and acknowledged                           | Troubled feelings are acceptable, teaches problem-solving   | p.12                    |
| Did you listen for feelings?  | NO             | Feels unsupported and defeated                             | Troubled feelings are not OK, doesn't teach the ability to work through the upset   | p.12                    |
| Did you listen reflectively by paraphrasing your child's words, as opposed to parroting them? | YES            | Feels understood and valued                                | It is OK to be upset, illustrates effective listening skills, teaches empathy, problem solving, independence              | p.12                    |

| Communication Checklist   |                |   |   |                         |
|---|----------------|---|---|-------------------------|
| Adults: Are you Listening Effectively?  | Adult's Action | Child's Probable Reaction/Feeling                           | Potential Insights Learned (Not Learned)  | Reference Page in Ebook |
| Did you listen reflectively by paraphrasing your child's words, as opposed to parroting | NO             | Feels dismissed and unsupported                             | It is not OK to be upset, doesn't demonstrate how to listen effectively and empathically, doesn't encourage independence, problem-solving | p.12                    |
| How was your body language - were your arms folded?                                     | YES            | Feels dismissed and unsupported                             | Sends a message that the listener is closed off, uninterested, doesn't demonstrate listening with sincerity                               | p.13                    |
| How was your body language - were your arms folded?                                     | NO             | Feels valued and respected                                  | Sincerely interested in hearing what the speaker has to say   | p.13                    |
| Did you ask follow-up questions, "tell me more..."                                      | YES            | Feels valued and respected                                  | Helps improve communication skills, illustrates how to listen with genuine interest   | p.14                    |
| Did you ask an emotional youngster to draw his/her feelings?                            | YES            | Feels a sense of release/relief, feels supported and valued | Children learn that there is a productive alternative to words, this outlet demonstrates problem-solving to children                      | p.14                    |

| Ideas for Capturing and Holding Attention                                  |  |                |
|--|--|----------------|
| Ways to Motivate Kids to Listen  | Probable Reaction/Insight  | Reference Page |
| Put the task into context - Explain the What, Why and How                  | Helps children feel valued and connected to the task if they know the reasons why they are doing something | p.14           |
| Describe Expectations for Behavior   | Makes them accountable, responsible  | p.14           |
| Vary Your Tone   | Helps maintain interest (especially applicable with the very young)  | p.15           |
| Use Visuals such as maps, globes, posters                                  | Tools to draw attention and interest   | p.15           |
| Audio - recordings and music   | Tools to draw attention and interest   | p.15           |
| Storytelling/parables when instructing                                     | Kids love stories and are more likely to focus and engage in the topic                                     | p.15           |
| Catchy Phrases   | Catches attention and stops the disruption (applicable with the very young)                                | p.15           |
| Personalize Lessons  | Draws them in to stay focused  | p.15           |
| Invite Participation (jobs, small groups, projects, class mtg.)            | Engages students, makes them accountable, responsible  | p.15           |
| Satisfy Needs (such as the need for fun)                                   | A fulfilled student is more likely to be motivated to listen and engage                                    | p.15           |
| Change Locations   | Raises energy level and helps maintain focus   | p.16           |
| Teacher's Proximity  | Motivation to pay attention if the teacher is close by   | p.16           |
| Instruct them to Focus "Peter I need your ears..."                         | Gets the very young to pay attention   | p.16           |
| Say it in Writing  | Directives in writing often help to get your kids to follow-through  | p.16           |
| Diffuse the Emotion, "I am happy to listen when you speak as calmly as me" | Effectively reduces the high level of emotion and encourages respectful communication                      | p.16           |