

Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

How to identify and support listening and attention levels.



Why?

- This is to support adults to identify a child's listening and attention level so that appropriate support can be put in place.
- Children who need support with their listening and attention may appear not to listen, to find it difficult to follow instructions or to concentrate on one thing at a time. They may also talk when it's their turn to listen, be easily distracted and appear not to notice what's going on around them when they are engaged in a task.

How?

Use the descriptors to find a 'best fit' attention level. Use the 'next steps' to support the child to develop their listening and attention skills.

Attention Level	How to support the next steps:
Level 1 - Fleeting Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flits from one activity to another. • Finds it difficult to focus on a task. • Very easily distracted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce distractions e.g. sounds, smells, number of resources, busy visual displays. • Support child-led play and follow their lead. • Use the child's interests to help them to access new experiences e.g. interest – trains, new experience – mark making with paint on the train wheels.
Level 2 - Rigid Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can focus on a self-selected task. • Focuses on one activity at a time. • Ignores what is going on around them in order to focus. • Follows their own agenda – not interested in adult directed activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce distractions. • Provide a range of activities that motivate the child. • Restrict the number of toys but provide choice. • Support child-led play and follow their lead. • Comment on what the child is playing with. • Use the child's name and a light touch to gain their attention before speaking.
Level 3 - Single-Channelled Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers to focus on a self-selected activity. • When engaged in an activity does not respond to an adult or peer unless their attention is gained first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play alongside the child with a duplicate set of toys. • Comment on what the child is doing. • To shift the child's attention, use the child's name and stop the activity before speaking.

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Can stop and listen briefly then return to their chosen activity.	
Level 4 - Focusing Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will join in with an activity suggested by an adult or peer. Is interested in what other people are doing. Is able to shift their attention to and from tasks more independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let the child know when it's time to listen e.g. an individual prompt or clapping to gain the group's attention. Keep instructions short – one step at a time. Demonstrate instructions or use visual prompts. Teach good listening skills.
Level 5 - Two Channelled Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can do two things at once e.g. paint a picture and talk about something that happened at home. Can follow instructions whilst playing. Can shift their attention without someone saying their name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a child is playing give directions related to the activity. When the child is playing begin talking about something unrelated. Increase the number of children taking part in the activity and give directions to the group. Encourage active listening.
Level 6 - Integrated Attention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can do two things at the same time for a prolonged period. Can control their attention on what they want to focus on. Can do what they are asked independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the complexity of instructions. Encourage conversations alongside activities.

Things to note:

- Remember that a child may have an undiagnosed hearing impairment. If in doubt, support the family to seek medical advice.
- Sometimes hearing difficulties vary throughout the year e.g. worsen when the child has a cold.
- This help sheet is part of the Identifying and Supporting Listening and Attention Toolkit:
[How to identify and support listening and attention levels.](#)
[How to use games to develop attention and listening.](#)

Reference / Evidence base – informed by:

Early Years Professional Development Programme 2020

Cooper, Moodley and Reynell Helping Language Development 1978