



How to support your child's listening and attention skills

Information for parents and carers from the Children and Young People's Therapy Service

Children learn speech, language, and communication skills in their natural environment. As parents / carers there is so much you can do to support your child's development.

This leaflet aims to provide parents and carers with information, activities, and tips. If after reading this leaflet, you still have questions or concerns, please go to our Children and Young People's Therapy web page. (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-peoples-therapy/>)

Why is it important for my child to listen and pay attention?

Good listening and attention skills are key in learning to communicate. These skills will help your child to:

- interact with others and the world around them
- follow what others are saying / doing
- understand what others are saying / doing
- learn to communicate
- speak clearly
- learn about the world around them.

How will my child's listening and attention develop?

All children will develop their listening and attention at different times, moving through the following stages.

- **Fleeting attention**
Easily distracted. Attention flits from one thing to another.
- **Rigid attention**

Concentrates on things they find interesting. Does not like others interrupting them.

- **Single channelled attention**

Can only concentrate on one thing at a time. Your child has to stop what they are doing in order to listen to others, and needs support to do this.

- **Focusing attention**

Gradually beginning to control their own focus of attention but can still only concentrate on one thing at a time. Now able to shift focus of attention from one thing to the other by themselves.

- **Two channelled attention**

Attention is now two-channelled, so your child can be doing a task and follow an instruction at the same time. Their concentration span is short but they can be taught in a group.

- **Integrated attention**

Joint attention, where two or more people share the same focus, is now established across different situations with different people.

How to develop your child's listening and attention skills

- Reduce background distractions where possible. Turn off the television and try to find a quiet space for you to play in.
- Get down to your child's level so you can be face-to-face with them.
- Let your child take the lead. If they choose the activity / toy they are more likely to have fun, pay attention, and learn.
- Slow down the pace of play, and when talking allow for silence whilst your child decides what they want to do next.
- Model the skills you want your child to use, such as sitting still and looking at them when they are talking.
- Use visuals to help listening and understanding, for example gestures, Makaton signs, or pictures.
- Focus on the positives, giving lots of praise. For example 'you did really good sitting'.
- Give instructions in small steps, emphasising key words (for example put the ball in the box).

Activities that will help your child's listening and attention skills

- Go for a 'listening walk', pointing out the sounds you hear. Can your child 'guess' what is making that sound?
- Play 'listen for the instruction' games. Can your child wait for you to say "go" before doing something, for example knocking a tower over that you have built with bricks / blowing more bubbles? Gradually lengthen the time your child waits.

- Play eye spy games. Get your child to find the item beginning with the sound you make or by colour (for example 'I spy something that's blue').
- Make musical instruments. For example fill an empty bottle with rice to shake, bang a saucepan with a spoon, or shake some keys. Take turns to guess which item made that sound when it is hidden from view.
- Read / say a well-known story or nursery rhyme and get your child to 'spot' the mistake. Make it fun by putting a 'silly' word in.

Useful websites

- Speech Link Parent Portal (<https://speechandlanguage.link/parent-portal/>)
- Chatter pack (<https://chatterpack.net/>) Click on 'Blog' then 'speech and language, occupational therapy and SEND'
- ICAN (<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/>)
- BBC Tiny Happy People (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>)
- Hungry Little Minds (<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>)
- Makaton (<https://www.makaton.org/>)
- Singing Hands (<https://singinghands.co.uk/>)
- Widgit Software Symbols (<https://www.widgit.com/>)

Follow our social media accounts for lots of ideas of how to support your child's communication skills, and links to other useful websites and resources.

- Facebook page: East Kent Children and Young People's Therapy Service
- Follow us on Twitter @ChildTherapyEK
- East Kent Children and Young People's Therapy Service (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-peoples-therapy/>)

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

Reference number: Web 482

First published:
June 2020

Last reviewed:
September 2022

Next review date:
January 2026

Copyright © East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust.