



## **Attention & Listening Activities**

This is an area that some children need specific and structured help with so that they can develop their skills. One contributing factor that can significantly impact on a child's ability to focus their attention is the environment. Pre-school settings are interesting places for children with lots of different things to look at and play with. When a child is learning to develop their attention and listening skills they can find it difficult to filter out all of this information. They therefore will be 'grabbed' by lots of different things making it difficult for them to focus on the task that you have introduced.

### **General things to consider**

- Where is the child sitting? Are there lots of things to look at that might be distracting them?
- Are they comfortable? Some children need support around their body so that they can keep a stable body posture. Sometimes using chairs, cushions or bean bags helps children to sit more easily.
- Looking away doesn't always mean a child is not listening – some children need look away from you so that they can listen to what you are saying. Eye contact is important but children will give it when the activity is interesting and motivating and when they feel relaxed.
- When there is too much choice children can find it difficult to know what to focus on. Limiting the amount of choice and offering only a few toys / activities can help them to focus their attention more easily.

### **General Strategies to use**

- Visual resources help the child to understand what it is they are currently doing. Use your now and next boards as well as visual timetables for the session.
- Sometimes it can be difficult for a child to know how long they have to concentrate for. Help them to focus by using concrete resources such as sand timers and clock timers. This helps them have a reference for how long they need to remain with an activity. Start with small amounts of time, gradually building up to longer sessions.
- Try and extend the activity each time by a few seconds. Over the period of time this will mean that the child is progressing with the length of time they can engage in an activity with.
- Try and bring a child back to the activity once they start to become distracted e.g. get them to briefly come back or have one more turn by introducing one last motivating toy as part of the game. This helps the child to develop their refocusing skills as well as their ability to shift their attention back.



## Games to play

- **Lotto / bingo games**
- **Kim's game** – try to use real objects and a small amount of them e.g. 3-4. Tell the child to close their eyes whilst you take away an object. Once the child opens their eyes ask them what is missing. Make sure you have talked through what all of the objects are before you begin so that you know the child has the vocabulary for them
- **Jigsaw puzzles** – make this an attention and listening activity by telling the child what piece to put in next. If the child is showing good focus you can make this a bit harder by giving them 2 pieces to put in.
- **Hide and seek with objects** – place some objects around the room and ask the child to go on a hunt for them. Remind them to look in high and low places.
- **Shopping game** – this can be with pretend food shopping or it can involve gathering any items from the room. Give the child a shopping list and ask them to go and find the items. If you think this might not be as motivating you can adapt it to involve 'silly' items to get or you can add a time element to it e.g. can they collect them before you count to 20.
- **Phone game** – you need 2 phones for this (one to use as the ringing and one to hide). Hide one phone somewhere in the room whilst the children are closing their eyes. Ask them to open their eyes whilst you ring the phone. The children have to listen to the phone ring and see if they can locate it.
- **Find the sound** – this is the same game as above however you can use any noise making toy or object. Hide it somewhere in the room and the child has to locate the item by listening to where it is coming from.
- **Simon says** – play this in the traditional way however remember to consider how many words you use in the instruction if the child has additional language difficulties.
- **Play dough** – each person has a piece of play dough. The adult gives an instruction about what to make with the play dough. You can encourage the children to listen to each other by asking them also to give an instruction to the other children in the group.
- **Musical bumps / statues** – play this in the traditional way so that the child has to listen to the music and stop when it stops playing. You can extend it further by introducing word commands that they have to listen out for e.g. instead of playing music say a number and this means they have to find a chair to sit on etc.
- **Catalogues / You Choose book** – turn over a page and say to the child 'Who can find a \_\_\_\_\_?'
- **Sleeping Lions** – all the children pretend that they are sleeping lions. The keeper tries to wake them up by tickling them, making noises near them etc. The children have to stay as still as possible.
- **Grandma's footsteps** – grandma stands with her back to the group of children. The children are at the opposite side of the room and have to try and get to grandma as quietly as possible. If a child makes a noise whilst they are tip toeing to grandma



then grandma turns round. If she spots who it was they have to go back to the start line.

- **Odd one out tasks:** looking at pictures together and trying to spot the difference or “odd one out”, is a great way to use looking and attention skills. Other skills will probably also come into play such as categorization (odd one out), attention to detail (spot the difference), *same / different*