

Improving Listening Skills Of A Pre-Schooler

(By Mrs. Meera Narain, Principal Kinder Valley International School, Gurgaon)



We all know that listening skills are vital in developing language as well as in learning to read. Educators worldwide have long known that listening and paying attention affects a child's success in School – his ability to listen, remember and learn throughout all curriculum areas. An old adage says everything - "When you talk, you hear only what you know. When you listen, you learn".

Listening skills begin developing early in a child's life. A few months after birth babies turn their heads towards comforting sounds. In fact, listening skills should be honed right from this time by encouraging activities to improve their ability to listen, as these skills do not develop automatically. **"Effective Listening"** is a communication skill that must be taught to a child at that age. In today's fast paced environment where one is constantly aspiring to meet deadlines, adults/parents too face a similar dilemma. This is turning out to be one of the greatest problems of this modern world where the ability to even listen to each other is missing. This further reflects in children of all ages. A normal claim by Parents is "My child cannot follow simple directions" OR "He is easily distracted and hears only what he wants to". Many children have notoriously selective listening skills as they hear and act on things they normally like to do and seem to tune out the rest. Developing Listening skills needs patience and is like strengthening a muscle by constant exercise so that it grows stronger.

We all know the problem but what is the solution? How can one help the child to be a good listener? Given below are a few suggestions, which may help your child by improving his/her listening skills:

- Well to begin with Good Listening must first be modeled and practiced by Parents themselves if it is to become a part of your child's character. The power of parental example cannot be overstated. If you want your child to be a good listener, you must be a good listener by providing a daily mirror of what your child can become.
- Understand your child and his reasoning ability, which is normally so different to our own. Remember to get down to the child's level of thinking – of what goes on his/her mind.
- Talk to your child all the time. Get in the habit of narrating chores like the story you read in the newspaper OR conversation you had with a friend OR When you go shopping tell him/her about shopping trips you used to take with your mother/father. In the kitchen you can talk about various things there like sugar, bread, eggs etc.
- Make reading an interactive habit. When reading to your child stop before you turn the page and ask "What do you think will happen next?" OR After you have read half the story, ask how the story will end. Listen to his answer carefully and if he seems unsure you may start again.

- Revisit old favorites – There are old, battered books/magazines/toys which were your child’s favorite at one time. Read them aloud once again. Only this time pause at tricky points to let him supply the words that come next OR while reading the story purposely change the key details to see how well your child is paying attention. If he hears something that is not correct he is sure to correct you.
- Listen to old stories together on tape/VCD/DVD. After a few minutes mute the sound and ask the child what the characters are saying.
- Make up silly Rhymes – the more absurd the better – e.g. “ The fat cat ate the hat. The rat ate the fat cat. Who ate the hat...?? This activity will teach your child to listen to words that sound similar and identify rhyming patterns.
- Play Listening games like Simon Says where you can give any instruction and ask him to repeat it word by word. Increase the instructions to two then three and if he does it in the right way give a prize at the end.
- Introduce a mascot at your home, which can be any toy/character the child loves the most. Use it to give instructions on your behalf like “Please put your toys away” OR “Pick up the engine and the car and let’s keep it together at a safe place”. Always make sure that the mascot praises the child at the end. Change the Mascot as per the change in the child’s liking for another toy/character. Be imaginative and improvise the delivery of your instructions or commands.
- Give clear commands and avoid changing them every minute. The child will also learn to say things to you in the right way.

The list is endless and we can go on and on. But remember you are responsible, as a parent, for the well being of your child and for all the things you teach him - no doubt a great responsibility. Who said being a Parent was easy?