



Listening to Learn



By
Robyn Merkel-Piccini, M.A., CCG-SLP

Teaching children to listen is often a difficult task. How does one describe an action that seems to occur automatically? It is important to bring awareness to children that listening can be a deliberate action over which they have control.

The first step in defining listening is to teach the anatomy of listening...and I don't mean just the ear! Listening occurs when the entire body is involved. It is important to start with sitting still, looking at the speaker, and having a quiet voice. While the ear is the key body part in listening, the eyes, bottom, hands, feet, and mouth are the "helpers."

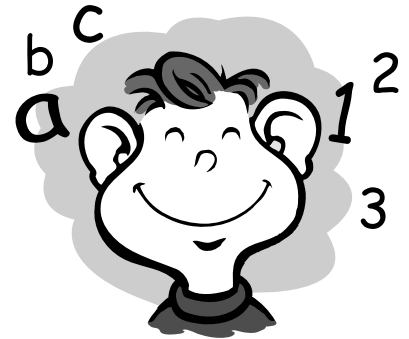
The next step in teaching listening skills is to help the children identify "distracters" that make listening difficult. The children can identify noises that make it hard to listen in the classroom such as: rain, talking, children playing, etc. It is also good to review what noises alert us to danger (for example, the fire drill bell) and what sounds alert us to fun (for example, music).

Since many children will need visual representation to understand this concept, an art project may help. Try making two cartoon ears, one that is "happy" and one that is "sad." Have the children sort photos, or perhaps draw little pictures of things that make the ear happy, like a quiet room, hands still, etc., and put them by the happy ear. Next, do the same for the sad ear by making visual representations of loud noises, noisy classrooms, busy hands and feet, etc.

The next step would be defining ways in which listening helps us learn such as "repeat what you have heard" or "ask questions about what you have heard."

In addition, memory strategies associated with listening are helpful, such as:

- listening for key words
- note taking
- outlining
- practicing the task in “your mind’s eye” before starting
- listening for words that are emphasized
- listing auditory distractions as they occur, discussing them and decreasing them
- recalling information



It is essential to remember that the above tasks cannot be achieved until a child has identified and tuned out distractions, has an awareness of environmental sound distracters, and can independently “tune in” by remembering to use the ears and the “helpers” (sitting still, looking, etc.)

Listening skills must be reviewed often in order to reinforce the skill. Awareness of the listening process should begin as early as preschool and should continue through most of a person’s education, even through adulthood.

REFERENCES:

- Barrick, W., *Whole Body Listening Throughout the Elementary School Years. Advance Magazine for Speech Pathologists and Audiologists, 2000.*
- Truesdale, S., *Whole Body Listening: Developing Active Auditory Skills., Language, Speech and Hearing Services in School, 1990, 21:183-184.*

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