

## Strategies to support Attention and Listening

Before we consider how to support children's attention and listening in class, there are a few factors that need to be established:



- **Physiological needs need to be met:** If a child is hungry, cold, too hot, very tired or has other unmet physical or sensory needs, they are going to find it very difficult to maintain attention. Children also need to have a level of emotional regulation in the moment to focus on a task.
- **The environment needs to be enabling:** Noise levels, lighting and other factors in the environment are highly important factors in enabling children to maintain attention.
- **Lesson content:** Children will always be able to maintain attention more effectively on learning they find meaningful, motivating and interesting and when it is taught at a level which matches their understanding of language and their ability.

Once these three factors have been established, we can use the following strategies to support children's attention and listening, particularly during lesson inputs:

### Prepare and prompt children to use their attention and listening skills:

Ensure children have had an opportunity to use the toilet, have a drink and meet other needs BEFORE they begin listening time.\*

Use a sand timer or online timer to show how long they will be expected to listen.

Pre-teach the 'Active Listening' skills you expect to see.\*\*

Draw a visual schedule of the lesson input and cross each activity off as you go.

 read the article	 talk partner time	 instruction for task
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\*Exceptions should be made where individually necessary. \*\*Active Listening looks different for every child, some children should not be asked to make eye contact.

Consider children's attention and focus time. **Try to keep lesson inputs to maximum 15 minutes.** If there is more content to cover, 'chunk' it with active tasks and movement breaks.


### Explicitly praise active listening skills:

'I can see you are looking at the board and thinking about the learning!'

### Use visuals to support understanding:

- To accompany text / verbal information
- To illustrate instructions
- To picture-code vocabulary

## Questioning

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- Consider which way of asking questions will engage all learners, for example, 'hands up' or selecting children at random?
  - For some learners who are less confident or have SLCN, it can be helpful to **prepare an answer with them before class** (pre-teaching a response). A teacher or member of support staff could say, 'I'm going to ask the class who their favourite character is in the story, let's think about and rehearse what you could say as an answer.'
  - Always ask a question, 'Wait for 8' to give processing time, and then pick someone to answer.

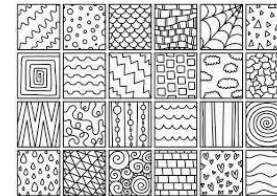
Try to **use the most minimal language possible** and stick to the most necessary information. This will not only make listening time shorter, it will mean children have less language to process.

Cue instructions: Instructions are often given at the end of the adult input, when some children have lost attention. For that reason, always regather attention by saying, **'I'm going to give an instruction now, let's check we're all listening.'**

**Use 'active' activities to chunk listening time**, these could include talk-partner discussions (this skill does need to be explicitly taught), movement breaks or mini-tasks on whiteboards etc.

## Consider what additional support some children may need in order to listen and pay attention, this may include reasonable adjustments such as:

- Providing a 'fidget' item
- Sensory processing items such as 'wobble' cushions or therabands
- Seating positions e.g. proximity to whiteboard / the speaker
- Enabling children to move around to maintain attention or colour-in whilst listening (listen and do)
- Completing a sensory circuit before a lesson input
- Ensuring physiological needs are met such as not being hungry
- Ensuring any specialist equipment is available when needed (including glasses)



### Listening and attention challenges: During longer lesson inputs, you could promote attention and listening by using playful challenges such as:

- Spot the X: Give children a topic-word or picture and challenge them to say 'Bingo!' first when they see it on a slide or you say it.
- Kim's Game: Add pictures / words related to the content on a slide / using real objects, give children one minute to look at the pictures / words and then cover them. Challenge them to tell their partner or write on the whiteboard how many pictures / words they can remember.
- 20 questions: Pick a topic related word / person such as 'Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>' and challenge children to ask 20 yes or no questions to try to work out the word.
- Odd one out. Place 5 – 10 topic-related words on the board and challenge children to identify which one does NOT relate to the topic and say why.

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