

# Attention and Listening

## Ideas and Fun Games to Play





## Overview

This tool was jointly developed by Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists. It has been adapted for use by teachers working with children with additional needs as part of Summer Provision.

This document provides top tips for teachers to support pupils' attention and listening skills. Also included are sample games and activities, which are targeted at developing attention and listening skills. The activities you choose will depend on the developmental stage and language skills of the pupil(s) you are working with. Further higher level attention and listening activities can be found here: <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Attention-and-Listening-Higher-Level.pdf>

This resource supports the key principles of 'Promoting a Sense of Calm' and 'Promoting Connectedness'.



## Why are attention and listening skills important?

Attention and listening skills are very important for children to be able to make sense of the words they hear and to respond to others. They form the foundation for the development of language and literacy skills. Children must first learn to pay attention to people, then to objects, then to people and objects. Good attention and listening skills enable children to learn new skills, including how to use language.

Participation in a short sensory motor circuit is a great way both to energise and prepare children for activities that require most attention and listening. The aim is to focus concentration in readiness for the activities that lie ahead. For more information please see ([Insert link to updated Let's Get Regulated document here](#))

Children might hear what you say, but they may not really listen to it. It is important that children become **active listeners**, thinking about what has been said, and with practice, beginning to make sense of it.

### Top Tips for Developing Attention and Listening Skills:

- 👍 Help the pupil to listen more by reducing background noise as much as possible e.g. turn down the TV, radio etc. This ensures that you have the pupil's full attention
- 👍 Call the pupil's name to get their attention
- 👍 Get down to the pupil's level to gain their attention
- 👍 Support the pupil to stop what they are doing before giving instructions and keep instructions short and simple
- 👍 Use gesture and visuals to support the pupil's attention to tasks
- 👍 Make use of everyday opportunities to encourage listening e.g. go on a listening walk and see how many sounds the pupil is able to hear and identify



This booklet aims to provide teachers of young children with game and activity ideas to develop a pupil's attention and listening skills. You will find **lots of games** in this booklet that will support a pupil to **develop their attention and listening skills** by:

- Motivating them to keep their attention through fun ideas
- Offering them opportunities for waiting their turn in games
- Encouraging them to remember what they have to do
- Listening to instructions during fun games
- Focussing their attention on the person speaking

These games also support the development of many other skills. You will see these skills listed at the end of each game idea.

## Kim's Game



### *How to play:*

Place objects on a tray. These objects could all be from the same category to support your pupil(s)'s understanding of categories e.g. transport items could include toy car, lorry, train, boat. Talk about the objects and label them.

Use a towel or blanket to cover the objects, and take one object away. Pupil to guess which object has been taken away.

### *Make this activity harder by:*

- ✓ Increase the number of objects you put on the tray for your pupil(s) to remember
- ✓ Increase the number of objects you take away

### **This game also helps with:**

 **Visual Memory**

 **Planning and Sequencing**

 **Vocabulary**

 **Following Instructions**

## Fruit Salad Game



**How to play:** Sit in a circle and give everyone a picture of a fruit or a real fruit. The leader calls out a fruit. If the leader says 'bananas', anyone holding the bananas switches seats. If you say "Fruit Salad" everyone has to swap.

**Make this activity harder by:**

- ✓ Increasing the number of the 'fruits' called e.g.
  - Say 2 different fruits and those people have to swap places (e.g. "bananas and oranges").
  - Say 3 different fruits and those people have to swap places (e.g. "bananas, oranges apples"), etc.
- ✓ Taking away the pictures and seeing if the pupil can remember their fruit.
- ✓ Swapping the pictures around after a few turns so that they now have to listen for a different item.

**This game also helps with:**

 **Memory**

 **Spacial Awareness**

 **Motor Planning**

 **Turn taking**

# Simon Says



**How to play:** One person is 'Simon' and the others are players. Simon tells the players what to do but they must only follow the commands that begin with the words 'Simon Says'. You can all take turns being Simon.

## Example commands:

1 part:

- ✓ Touch your toes
- ✓ Hands on your head

**Make this activity easier by:** using pictures of actions to support the verbal instruction.

**Make this activity harder by:** giving longer instructions, e.g.

2 parts, e.g.

- ✓ First do a twirl, then clap your hands
- ✓ First jump, then count to 3

3 parts, e.g.

- ✓ First shake your body, next touch your nose, last sit down
- ✓ First run to the grass, next stamp your feet, last turn around

**This game also helps with:**



Following Instructions



Social Skills



Motor Skills



Memory



Body Awareness



Understanding Concepts

## Shopping Game



**How to play:** Collect empty cartons and boxes and set up a pretend shop. Ask the pupil to go to the shop and "buy" a list of items.

Choose an appropriate amount of items for the pupil's level. You could start by having your pupil(s) listen to one item, then increase to 2 items, e.g. adult to say: "Get the banana" or "Get the banana and the bread".

**Make this activity harder by:**

- ✓ Introduce a shopping basket and a shopping trolley (pictures or toys) to make the instruction longer, e.g. "Put the banana in the trolley" or "Put the pizza in the basket"
- ✓ Ask your pupil(s) to find different types of foods, e.g. "Find a fruit" or "Find a vegetable", "Find something you keep in the fridge"

**Adapt:**

Encourage your pupil(s) to give the instructions to the shopper once they are familiar with the game.

**This game also helps with:**



Motor Skills



Organisation & Planning



Independent Living Skills



Active Listening



Visual Recall



Vocabulary

# Washing Line



## **How to play:**

Tie a piece of washing line between two chairs.

Give your pupil(s) different items of dolls' clothes, e.g. trousers, T-shirts, socks, pants, dresses.

Adult to say: "Put dolly's socks / trousers / dress on the washing line".

## **Make this activity harder by:**

- ✓ Using colour and item, e.g. "Put dolly's red socks on the line".
- ✓ Using patterns of the clothing, e.g. "Put clothes with stripes / spots on the line"
- ✓ Giving the pupil two or more items to put on the line, e.g. "Put the scarf and pyjamas on the line"
- ✓ Introducing a washing machine and a washing line (pictures or toys), e.g. "Put the socks in the washing machine"

## **Adapt:**

- Encourage your pupil(s) to give the instructions once they are familiar with the game.

## **This game also helps with:**



**Motor Skills**



**Fine motor skills**



**Independent Living Skills**



**Active Listening**



**Memory**



**Organisation and Planning**

## Listening Stories and Songs



### ***How to play:***

Give everyone listening an object or a picture relating to a word in a story. Read the story. When they hear the word said, they have to stand up.

This can be played with songs and nursery rhymes. For example, in 'Old McDonald', hand out animals from the song to everyone. When they hear their animal named, they stand up.

### ***Make this activity harder by:***

Play without objects or by giving additional words for pupils to listen out for.

### ***Adapt:***

You can also play this by having your pupil(s) listen out for a 'special word' during the activity. They should stand up when they hear it, e.g. "When you hear the word marshmallow, we all stand up".

### **This game also helps with:**

 **Waiting**

 **Awareness of Rhyme**

 **Word Recognition**

 **Turn taking**

## Traffic Lights Game



**How to play:** Ask the pupil(s) to start at one end of the yard/room.

- On the command '**GREEN**' the pupil(s) run as **fast** as they can around the yard/room.
- On the command '**AMBER**' the pupil(s) **slow** down to a trot/jog.
- On the command '**RED**' the pupil(s) **stop**.

*Give commands at random to keep pupils paying attention!*

### **Adapt:**

- ✓ Use visual colour cards instead of verbal commands
- ✓ Use other word/pictures to represent speed of movement e.g. snail, hare
- ✓ DVD Player Game: You and your pupil(s) find a space and change your movements according to instructions relating to the functions of a DVD player. For example:

Fast forward = run forward

Rewind = walk backwards

Play = walk forwards

Eject = jump up

Pause = stop

### **This game also helps with:**

 **Gross motor skills**

 **Memory**

 **Balance**

 **Understanding concepts**

# Animal Walks



**How to play:** Discuss with your pupil(s) how different animals move:

- Bunny hops - crouch down and spring up
- Kangaroo - jump two feet together
- Snake - on tummy and commando crawl
- Bear - crawl on all-fours
- Be different types of dinosaurs
- Adopt positions/movements on the leader's command

**Make this activity harder by:**

- ✓ Increasing the distance over which your pupil(s) has to move
- ✓ Increasing the length of time your pupil(s) has to maintain each position
- ✓ Linking different types of animal walks
- ✓ Having an animal Olympics or an animal parade

**This game also helps with:**



**Gross motor skills**



**Memory**



**Balance**



**Motor Planning**



**Understanding action words  
and concepts**

## Take a message!



### **How to play:**

- Two players at a time.
- Use two "phones" (e.g. toy phones, old mobile phones, cups connected by a string).
- Take turns saying a message. The other person has to repeat it back.

### **Make this activity harder by:**

Use a longer or more complex sentence for the message.

### **Adapt:**

Play with a group of people. The first pupil whispers a message to the person beside them and that person whispers to the next and so on. The last person repeats back the message that they've heard to the whole group. Does it match the original message or did it change?

### **This game also helps with:**



**Understanding**



**Saying sentences**



**Memory**



**Turn taking**

# Silly Stories



## How to play:

- Read a familiar story but make deliberate mistakes.
- For example: The Three Little Pigs: "The wolf huffed and puffed and kicked the house down"

## Or

- Read a short unfamiliar story twice. Change some key details the second time you read it. For example:
  - First time: "Jenny's Dad told her to pick up her toys..."
  - Second time: "Jenny's Mum told her to pick up her apples..."
- Can the pupil(s) spot the mistakes? Have a fun system where the pupil(s) can alert you to the mistakes.
  - For example, pupil(s) could press a buzzer/ ring a bell/make a sound/ raise hand and say "major mistake!" etc.

## Adapt:

Make this activity harder or easier by adding more of less mistakes for your pupil(s) to stop. Difficulty can also be adapted by making the mistakes more obvious or more subtle.

**This game also helps with:**



Understanding sentences



Problem solving



Memory



Active listening



## Listening Song



To the tune of Frere Jacques:

Eyes are watching,

Ears are listening,

Lips are closed,

Hands are still,

Feet are very quiet,

You should really try it,

Listening well, listening well



- ✓ This song can be sung every day as part of your daily routine.
- ✓ Remember to use gestures and point to body parts as you sing.
- ✓ You could use puppets to model 'good sitting' and 'good listening'.
- ✓ You could use visual helpers (pictures), e.g. for listening ears, good sitting.