



# **LISTENING SKILLS**

## Reintegreat School Toolkit

### Listening Skills

#### Introduction

Good listening is a vital life skill that underpins children's ability to learn, communicate, and form positive relationships. It is required across every aspect of school life – from assemblies and PE lessons to playtime, social interactions, and classroom learning.

For some children, particularly in the early years, good listening does not come naturally and needs to be explicitly taught and modelled. Research suggests that children can generally pay full attention for **around one minute per year of age**. By the time they leave primary school, most children can sustain focused listening for approximately **11 minutes**.

#### The Purpose of Listening

The key objectives of listening are to:

- Communicate effectively
- Learn and process new information
- Obtain and retain knowledge
- Understand instructions and social cues
- Enjoy stories, conversations, and experiences

#### Listening Difficulties in Children

Although many children occasionally lose focus, some experience ongoing difficulties. A first step is to **rule out medical issues** such as intermittent hearing loss (e.g., glue ear), which is common in children who frequently suffer from colds.

Listening difficulties may include:

- Poor sound awareness (difficulty discriminating between different sounds)
- Struggles with reading and phonological awareness
- Challenges with play and socialising
- Delays in language and communication development

#### Five Core Tips for Improving Listening Skills

1. **Stop talking** – allow children the space to respond without interruption.
2. **Maintain eye contact** – this builds focus and reassurance.
3. **Ask questions** – prompts engagement and ensures understanding.
4. **Repeat back** – model active listening by summarising what has been said.
5. **Visualise words** – encourage children to create a mental image of what they are hearing.

## Classroom Strategies for Supporting Listening

### Environment & Seating

- Minimise distractions by seating pupils away from windows, doors, or corridors.
- Place children with listening difficulties near the teacher or alongside strong role models.
- Reduce unnecessary visual or auditory distractions in the learning space.

### Instruction & Task Management

- Always **cue pupils in by name** before giving an instruction.
- Break instructions into **short, manageable steps** (avoid long sequences).
- Use a **task management board** or write instructions on the whiteboard in order (e.g., date, objective, task steps).
- Provide **visual supports** (cards showing: “good listening,” “good sitting,” “eyes looking,” “quiet voice”). Reward pupils for demonstrating these behaviours.

### Engagement & Attention

- Use storytelling, real-life examples, and props to hold attention.
- Add novelty and mystery (e.g., an object-in-a-box linked to the lesson).
- Signal transitions with music, countdowns, or consistent gestures (e.g., raised hand, clapping pattern).
- Use prediction activities (“What do you think will happen next?”) to sustain attention during stories.
- Encourage group listening with “add-on” stories, where each child contributes a sentence to build a shared narrative.

### Inclusion & Differentiation

- Provide jobs or responsibilities at transition times for children who struggle to sit and listen.
- Allow pupils who concentrate better while doodling or fidgeting to do so, where appropriate.
- Offer **extra processing time** for children who need longer to understand instructions.

- Ask children to **repeat back instructions** to reinforce understanding.
- Maintain **frequent, brief check-ins** with vulnerable pupils (“How are you getting on?”).

### Positive Reinforcement

- Use **proximity praise** to highlight good listening behaviours nearby.
- Display photos or visuals of “good listening” in the classroom and refer to them often.
- Consistently praise attentive listening and link it to progress in learning.

### Summary

Listening is a skill that develops over time but requires explicit teaching and modelling. Through **clear expectations, structured routines, engaging teaching strategies, and positive reinforcement**, schools can support children in becoming active and effective listeners. This not only improves their ability to learn but also builds stronger relationships and social confidence.

Would you like me to also design a **visual “Good Listening” classroom poster** (with icons for eyes, ears, mouth, hands, body) that could be included in this toolkit as a practical resource for teachers?

