Attention and Listening Development

0-12 months

Children at this age are very easily distracted. A child’s attention is held only for a few moments by the dominant stimulus in the environment. They may:

* Quieten or alert to the sound of speech.
* Turn towards a familiar sound and then begin to locate a range of sounds with accuracy.
* React to interactions with others by smiling, looking and moving.

1-2 Years

Children of this age can concentrate for a short period on a task that is of interest to them. A child’s attention may be rigid and inflexible as to concentrate they must cut out other stimuli in the environment. Because they can only concentrate on one task at a time this stage of attention development is called ‘single channelled’. Children will:

* Listen to and enjoy rhythmic patterns in rhymes and stories.
* Demonstrate enjoyment by trying to join in with actions or vocalisations.

2-3 Years

With adult help, e.g. using the child’s name and ‘look’, ‘watch’ children of this age are starting to be able to shift their attention from a task to directions. Children will:

* Recognise and respond to many familiar sounds, e.g. turning to a knock on the door, looking at or going to the door.
* Show an interest in play with sounds, songs and rhymes.

3-4 Years

Children of this age are beginning to be able to control their own focus of attention. They must still give their full attention (both looking and listening) to follow directions. They will need to stop what they are doing to be able to listen. Children will start to:

* Listen to others one to one or in small groups, when conversation interests them
* Listen to stories with increasing attention and recall

4-5 Years

Children of this age can carry out one activity and at the same time attend to someone else giving them directions (e.g. listening while colouring). This is called dual channelled attention. Most children will have well established dual – channelled attention by the time they begin full-time education. They can also give their full attention for short periods. They may still get distracted by other things going on around them (e.g. someone walking into the room).

5-7 Years

Children at this age can focus their own attention on one activity for longer periods of time without being reminded. They can listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity. They can focus their attention sufficiently to:

* Can listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity.
* Focuses his/her attention sufficiently to follow verbal classroom instructions.
* Can listen to a short story or conversation and answer simple questions.

7-9 Years

At this age, children can focus their own attention on one activity for longer periods of time without being reminded. They can listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity. They can focus their attention sufficiently to:

* Concentrate on a chosen activity for over 15 minutes without being reminded by an adult.
* Listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity.
* Listen to a short story or conversation and answer simple questions.

9-11 years

Children at this age are now able to focus their own attention on one activity for longer periods of time without being reminded. They can listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity. They can focus their attention sufficiently to:

* Concentrate on one activity for longer periods of time without being reminded by an adult.
* Listen to information whilst carrying out another simple activity.
* Listen to a short story or conversation and answer simple questions.

11-14 Years

At this age, children can:

* Focus their own attention on one activity without support to remain focused.
* Can follow a conversation or lesson without asking for frequent repetitions.
* Focuses their attention in the classroom, screening out some background noise.
* Can follow a conversation and follow who’s talking in a group

14+ Years

At this age, children can:

* Focus their own attention on one activity without support to remain focused.
* Can follow a conversation or lesson without asking for frequent repetitions.
* Focuses their attention in the classroom, screening out some background noise.
* Can follow a conversation and follow who’s talking in a group