

Attention and listening

Being able to listen and pay attention to what is being said and what is being done is essential to language and play development. It is being able to focus eyes/ears on an activity for a length of time and ignoring everything else that is going on.

It can be tricky to learn this skill and it needs to be built up over time with lots and lots of repetition.

If your child is struggling with attention and listening and only able to attend to an activity for a few seconds, then they can probably only listen for a few seconds. So start with a few seconds and gradually add a little bit more. For example, if your child will sit and give joint attention to a book with you for 2 pages, try to work up to 3 pages, then 4 etc. Celebrate your success at each stage!

- Use motivating activities i.e. things your child likes. We all pay more attention to things we are interested in. Use something your child really loves to try to build up their attention span. Watch what they are doing and get down on the floor with them, join in their play - follow their lead - then begin adding something simple to what they are doing. Eventually they will start to move on to being able to follow your lead sometimes too.
- Offer a choice from 2 activities. Often very multi-sensory toys work well for this – ones with lots to see, hear and feel! Don't just give your child the toy and let them play – the idea is that the two of you are sharing attention on the same thing. If it is a wind-up toy, take turns to wind it up and watch it go, or see if your child can watch you set it off and request a repeat of the activity. Don't make it into a battle of wills! Once your child's attention to the activity has gone, just stop and try again another time.
 - **Praise.** Remember this can be really hard. Keep positive and praise the child whenever they try to sit and do something with you.

Here are some fun things you could try:-

Ball games

Soft balls are safer for indoor play.

- Turn-taking; Rolling a ball to another person and catching when they roll it back again is a very simple activity, but it can be used to work on all sorts of skills – copying an action, shared attention, eye contact and taking turns with an adult. All of these are really important early language and social skills.
- Waiting; after a while start to build up the child's attention level by holding on to the ball for a little longer and saying, "Ready steady..." then pausing before saying "go". This builds up the child's attention level and often encourages early vocalisations. When your child makes eye contact says "go" or any vocalisation / makes a movement with their body that indicates they want you to continue then roll the ball back to them.
- Making choices; once the child has mastered rolling a ball back and forth, you can add in a choice element – offer a choice between 2 different balls. Add an extra person into the play. Mummy's turn or use the child's name to give a sense of self.
- Early listening games; stick pictures of animals on skittles and ask/help the child to roll the ball to the named animal and when it has been knocked down name the animal, make the animal sound and use the Makaton sign for the animal if you know it.
- Early concepts; if you have lots of balls you can sort them into big ones and little ones or sort them by colour to re-enforce these concepts.
- Prepositions – put the ball in different places – behind the sofa, under the chair, next to the table etc.
- Take turns to drop balls into different containers/ down tubes.

Bubble play

Most people love bubbles however there are some children who hate them and find them disgusting, sticky horrible things.

- They are a fun no pressure way to have fun together and are great for introducing early vocabulary and repetition. E.g. Bubbles , Pop, pop, pop. Gone, more, big bubble, little bubble, up/down.
- When you have played for a while and the bubbles have all popped, put the wand back in the pot and say “Bubbles gone/finished” you can add a shocked look to your face to emphasise emotion. Then wait. Give your child time to process that the fun has stopped. If your child reaches towards the wand, makes a sound or looks at you they are telling you they want the game to continue. This is communication. Reward this by responding and saying “more?” you can expand to “more bubbles” as your child becomes more used to the game then blow more bubbles.
- Ready steady go can also be used. Before saying Go wait for a response such as eye contact/ body movement/ vocalisation before blowing the bubbles.
- Pop the bubbles with clapping hands or stamping feet either fast or slow, take turns with siblings or parents.
- Name the body parts that are popping the bubbles, hands/finger/feet.
- Try and catch a bubble on your finger.
- Put bubble bath in a bowl use a whisk or hands to stir the water and make lots of bubbles.
- Hide toys under the bubbles to find.
- Wash toys together in the bubbly water. Use cloths/ sponges to wash up and down/round and round. Make up silly songs to go with the actions.
- A bowl with just plain water and a variety of paintbrushes are great fun for patio painting. If you don't have a garden as long as the brushes are clean let your child paint the walls while they are in the bath. Use up /down/ to and fro and round and round actions.
- Make a bubbly bottle toy. Half fill a plastic bottle with water. Add some food colouring and a good slug of liquid detergent. Paint some glue around the top of the bottle before screwing on the cap and leaving to dry (alternatively, tape the bottle shut with masking tape). Now shake!

Make your own Bubble mixture

1/2 cup of dish detergent (washing up liquid), 5 cups water, 2 tablespoons glycerine

Mix the ingredients **very slowly** together, a stick is good for doing this. if you go too fast you will make a load of bubbles.

Homemade Bubble wands

You can have fun by looking for different items around the house that can be used to make bubbles. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Paperclips – bend them into wands or use as they are.
- Biscuit cutters
- Pipe cleaners
- Fly swatters

Stacking cups and boxes.

Build up a stack of cups or boxes Then say “ready steady go” before the child knocks them down. To begin with just use a couple of cups/boxes and gradually build up to more and more.

Books

Some children will naturally sit and look at books. Others need a bit more encouragement. Try interactive books such as ones where you can lift flaps, press buttons to play sounds etc. Don't worry about reading all the words on the page – to start with, just flip through the pages with your child and point out things of interest in the pictures. Build up to reading the whole story gradually.