

Top Tips for Building Listening Skills

Make Sure You Have Your Child's Attention

Before you give an instruction, say your child's name and make sure they're looking at you and listening. If your child is in the middle of an activity wait until they've finished what they're doing or until there is a natural break in the activity.

Make Sure Your Demands Are Reasonable

Only ask your child to do what they're capable of – make sure your instructions are age-appropriate and avoid giving instructions if your child is highly distressed or in the middle of another task.

Use Repetition

Your toddler's language and comprehension skills are still developing so they may need you to give an instruction more than once. As a general rule, if after 5-seconds your child hasn't responded to your instruction, get their attention and repeat the instruction again. If you're unsure if your child has heard you, ask them to repeat the instruction back to you. This will also help you confirm that your toddler has understood what you've asked them to do.

Give Instructions Instead of Making Requests

Next time you're asking your toddler to do something listen to see whether you've given an instruction ("please pick up your books now") or made a request ("can you please pick up your books now?") Instructions help toddlers to clearly understand what's expected.

Simplify Instructions

Give brief instructions and only one instruction at a time – "pick up your books" rather than "pick up your books and get your shoes and socks, we have to go out soon so you need to start packing your things away".

Make Sure You Follow Through

Stay in the room so you can monitor whether or not your toddler is complying with your request. If you've given an instruction twice and your toddler hasn't responded, remain calm and physically prompt (help) your toddler to complete the task.

If you're not able to follow through *avoid giving instructions* – when you don't follow through with instructions, your child learns that they don't need to listen to what you say

Praise Good Listening

If your child complies with a request and demonstrates good listening, praise their efforts. Make sure you use specific praise so your child understands exactly what it is they've done to deserve your praise.

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Listening Skills

Between the ages of 1 and 4 toddlers develop many new skills, including receptive and expressive communication skills which help toddlers to:

- Listen and understand what is expected of them
- Express their own needs and wants

Listening skills are a core communication skill that help toddlers to meet behavioural expectations and build social relationships. Many toddlers develop listening skills naturally, while others need more targeted skills practice.

There are a number of reasons why a toddler might have difficulty listening. Some toddlers may have hearing difficulties, others may have receptive language difficulties (difficulties understanding language). In most cases though, toddlers can be helped to build stronger listening skills.

There are a number of things you can do to help your child build listening skills. For example, you can modify:

- The number of instructions you give
- The complexity of instructions
- The timing of instructions
- The specificity of instructions

This tips sheet covers tips for helping your child to build listening skills.

If your toddlers listening difficulties persist speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.