

Listening Age 3 Summary

Why Listening?

Children learn about themselves and how they relate to others through sensitive, caring interactions with you. Now that your child is preschool age, inquisitive, and exploring, they need to be able to follow your instructions to stay safe in your home, the neighborhood, and their classroom. Your focus on listening and communicating with your child will lay a critical foundation for trusting interactions.



Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- If a child cries, offer comfort items like a favorite teddy bear or a blanket. Do not attempt to talk anything through when a child is distraught. Focus on calming down first.
- If a child hits or bites in anger or frustration, stop and say, *“Ouch. That hurts my arm, and it hurts my feelings.”* Then, be sure to reflect on the anger. *“You are angry. What can you do that is safe and doesn’t hurt others when angry?”* Practice some simple ideas like hugging a pillow or walking outside together.
- Name the feeling each time your child is upset or expresses any big feeling and ask if you are correct. *“You seem angry. Is that right?”*

You can also name feelings when your child is happy or excited and ask if you are correct. *“You seem happy. Is that right?”* Naming feelings helps your child better understand their thoughts, feelings, and challenges related to how they feel when they struggle with focus and listening so that you can address them.

Tip: To help your child listen and cooperate, keep directions short, clear, slow, and brief. Support your instructions with body language such as pointing or motioning.



Teach New Skills

- Model listening while interacting with your child.
 - Share the focus. As you spend time with your child, follow their lead. As they pretend to play, join in their world.

- Notice gestures and listen for thoughts and feelings. When they express a feeling on their face or through their body, name it and ask if it's true. *"You look sad. Are you feeling sad?"*
- Help your child understand other people's feelings by asking them how they think others feel in certain circumstances. You could say, *"How do you think your friend felt when they fell at the playground?"* Or, when reading a story or in pretend play, you could ask, *"How do you think the boy in the story feels right now?"*
- Children require your attention to thrive. So, why not build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your child has to tell you? Give it a special name you and your child create, like "Mom and Susie's Special Time." Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself: "What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I'm listening?"
- Create a safe base—a place in the house your child can choose to go when they want comfort. Place a pillow, blanket, and stuffed animal there. Use it to play an act: *"I am getting red in the face. I'm hot. I feel angry. I'm going to my safe base to calm down."*
- Narrate your feelings. For example, when meeting someone new, talk about how you feel and ask how they feel. *"I am feeling excited to meet our new neighbor. How are you feeling?"*

Trap: Never command your child to go to their safe base when they are upset. Instead, gently remind, *"Would your safe base help you feel better?"* Offer it as a free choice. If you tell them to go there, it takes away their ownership. Your child will not have the opportunity to practice and internalize the self-management skills the experience has the opportunity to build.

Trap: We can get into the habit of saying "No," nagging, or scolding when a child is learning through play and struggling with listening. Before doing any of these, pause and ask yourself, "How can I better communicate what my child needs to do?" Then, clearly communicate on eye level what they can do rather than what they shouldn't do or aren't doing well. For example, you could say, *"Let's gather your toys together so we can start making dinner."*



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements and ask them to demonstrate listening. For example, you could say, *"Show me how you listen and let your sister finish her story."*
- Recognize effort using "I notice..." statements like, *"I noticed how you listened fully to your sister when upset. That's so helpful to her."*
- Several games and songs require strong listening skills. Offer practice by playing these games with your child.

- *Hide and Seek* is a favorite child game. In it, the child tries to figure out where you've hidden or where you've hidden from you. This also exercises turn-taking skills, which are essential to communication.
- *Simon Says*. Parents can play the leader first to model how the game is played. Call-out instructions are always preceded by “*Simon says.*” “*Simon says, patting your shoulders. Simon says, stop.*” Call out a command that isn’t introduced with “*Simon says,*” and the person who isn’t listening carefully and moves on that command must take on the leader role.
- *Music Making*. Experiment with various children’s music, movie music, classic pieces, Reggae, Motown, and other genres that inspire dancing, singing, and playing along. Grab pots, pans, and spoons for instruments. Talk about the different instruments you can hear in the music.
- *Yellow Light, Green Light, Red Light - Stop!* This classic game helps children practice impulse control. Adults can lead with children, beginning from the other side of the room. Each time the adult spins around with their eyes shut, they recite the phrase, “Yellow light, green light, red light - stop!” Children run on yellow and green toward the leader but must freeze on red. If the leader turns around and sees running on red, the runner returns to start and tries again.
- Read together. Involve your child in holding the book, turning pages, and predicting what will come next. Hold onto a page before turning it and ask, “*What do you think will happen next?*” Reflect on the story, and you’ll take the learning opportunity one step further. “*Do you think Little Red Riding Hood was excited to go to Grandma’s house?*”



Support Your Child’s Development and Success

- Learn about your child’s development.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different listening strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your child, especially when communication becomes challenging.
- Engage in further practice. Play listening games to reinforce skills, such as “*Let’s see if you can name all the sounds we hear when we go outside!*”
- Apply logical consequences when needed. Logical consequences should follow soon after a behavior and need to be provided in a way that maintains a healthy relationship. Rather than punishment, a consequence is about supporting the learning process.

Trap: When your child does not listen to you or focuses elsewhere, you might be tempted to scold or nag, but be sure and give them additional chances. We all lose our focus sometimes. Get down on their level, eye to eye, and review what you said again to help them refocus their attention. End with a smile or hug to reinforce your connection.



Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when all is going well. When your child is listening and following your instructions, say, "*I noticed you listened when I asked you to begin picking up your toys. I know you were having fun.*"
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them. "*I noticed how you waited while I was talking with someone else. Love seeing that!*" "*I saw you go to help your friend when they fell at the playground today. That was kind of you.*"
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs, high-fives, and claps as ways to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Listening Age 3 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

This content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Tools for Your Child's Success communities, financial supporters, contributors, SAMHSA, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

© 2024 Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University