aiming high with communication

Practical activities to support listening and attention

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Learning to Listen

Concentrating on what someone says against a background of noise is a skill children have to learn.

Learning to listen develops in stages.

Sometimes, knowing these stages can help us to understand why a child behaves as he does.

1. Fleeting attention

The child's attention quickly moves from one new thing that he hears, sees, feels or smells to another.
This is normal for children under 12 months.

2. Rigid attention

The child concentrates so hard on something that he doesn't hear anything. You can talk to him but he will not respond. He appears to be ignoring you and you may think he is being naughty. Please be careful - he might not be. He may just not be aware of anything else. You may have to touch him gently to gain his attention.

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3. Adult help is needed to help him to concentrate on something else.

The child can switch his attention but you need to call his name first and help him concentrate on
something different. This is normal for three to four year old children.

4. Can listen and do two things at once

The child can carry on doing one thing but can listen and respond to something different. This is the stage a child needs to reach by the age of six.

There are three main areas to think about:

1	2	3
Concentration	Listening	Turn taking

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Helpful hints for listening and concentration

Special Time

Listening and concentrating is something we have to learn to do.
It is a valuable skill and worth spending time helping your child. acquire it

✓ Try to find 5 minutes everyday for 'special time.'

This is time to talk and do something together.
It can help if you choose the same time everyday otherwise it will never get done!

✓ During 'special time' turn off all background noise.

✓ Remove all distractions.

✓ Let the child choose from a range of things he likes to do. Let him lead the activity so that he is interested in what you are doing.

✓ Remember all the points from the Chat Challenge.

If you achieve the Chat Challenge this will help the child to listen and concentrate because:

- He will be talking about what he is interested in
- He will be able to lead the conversation
- He will have your attention and you will have his
- He will hear new information that is interesting and relevant to him
- He will be praised about something that he enjoys talking about.

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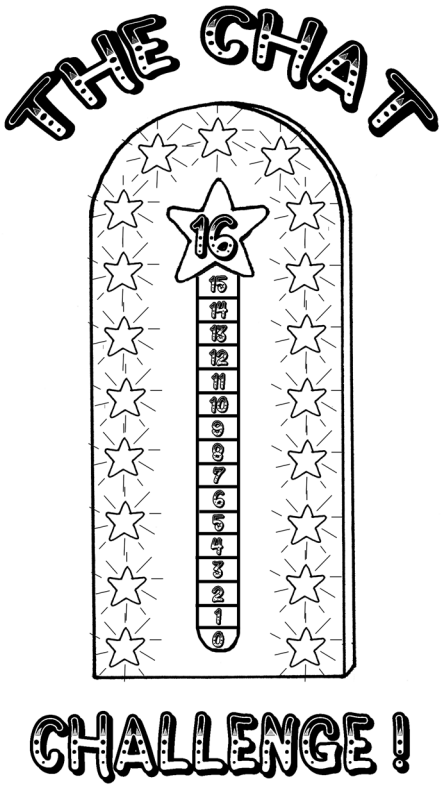

The Chat Challenge!

Supporting listening and concentration

The way adults interact affects how children concentrate and communicate!

It is not easy to change the way we communicate.

The next time you talk with your child think about the following……..

Did you……	never	sometimes	always
Wait for the child to talk?			
Follow what the child wanted to talk about?			
Listen to what the child said?			
Allow thinking time?			
Repeat what the child said so he heard good examples?			
Add a short, simple idea?			
Make you voice sound interesting?			
Limit the number of questions asked?			
Give lots of praise?			

Score 0 for every 'never', score 1 for every 'sometimes' and score 2 for every 'always'.

Add up the total and enter it on the Chat Challenge totaliser. A score of 12 or more is good. A score below 12 suggests that there is some work to do!

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Games to encourage concentration

Special time is particularly important if the child finds it difficult to concentrate. Gradually increase the time the child joins in with one of these activities. Use a kitchen timer so he believes you when the time is up. Start for just 3 or 5 minutes and increase the time gradually by only one minute every week. In 4 weeks he will concentrate for nearly 10 minutes.

This will be a real improvement!

(If he starts to lose concentration, reduce the time by one minute and stick to this for a week before increasing it again)

Games to develop concentration during special time.

- Drawing and colouring
- Cutting and gluing
- Puzzles
- Construction toys e.g. lego, K'nex
- Action man or Barbie type dolls
- Balancing games e.g. Buckaroo, Jenga
- Surprise games e.g. Pop up Pirate
- Kim's game.

Helpful Hints

Provide a limited choice of activities

- Sit alongside him and use the same or similar materials.
- Model appropriate behaviour
- Show an interest in what he does
- Respond using the Chat Challenge
- Don't ask too many questions. This will distract him
- Don't be afraid of silence!

Computers can help children to concentrate. The child is attracted by the rapidly moving pictures, the noises, the control they have and the rewards. This type of concentration is valuable but it does NOT develop all the skills a child needs to communicate with people.

Special time is important for children.

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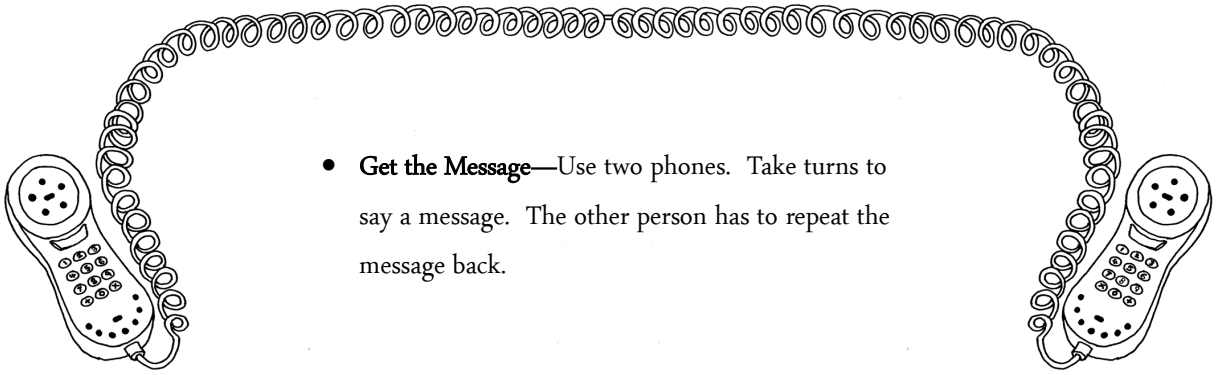
Games to encourage listening

- **Shopping**—Collect empty cartons and boxes. Use these to set up a pretend shop. Ask the child to go to the shop and buy two, three or four things.

- **Simon Says—**take turns to give each other instructions. Start with easy ones E.g. 'touch you toes and turn around.' If he can do this, make it harder E.g. 'touch you elbow, rub your tummy and jump up and down.'



- **Get the Message—**Use two phones. Take turns to say a message. The other person has to repeat the message back.

- **Spot it!** - Read a familiar story but make deliberate mistakes. Can the child spot them? Give the child a box and six counters or healthy snacks such as grapes. Every time he spots a mistake he puts a counter or grape in the box. The game ends when he has spotted six errors. Eating the grapes could be a good motivator!

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Games for when you are out and about

- **Run and touch**—outside walk around the garden or playground and name various things e.g. washing line, chair, tree, flowerpot. You can then sit down and call the child to you. Ask him to run and touch two or more things e.g. 'Run and touch the tree and the gate.' He should enjoy this and come back for more!

- **Hide and seek**—Play this indoors or out doors. Tell your child where to hide 8-10 toys or objects. Once they are all hidden the child can run off and find two or more objects you ask for.

- **I spy with my little eye**—Play this anywhere! If the child does not know what sound objects begin with, play I spy but give a clue e.g. 'I spy with my little eye something that's tall and has green leaves'.

- **I went shopping and I bought**— This is a good game to play in the car. One person starts, 'I went shopping and I bought a football' the next person repeats what he has heard but adds an item e.g. 'I went shopping and I bought a football and an apple' etc. You keep going until the players cannot remember the list of items. Can you get up to four or five things?

- **I went into space and I saw…….** Use the game 'I went shopping and I bought' but vary the theme to include anything that the child is interested in. For example, 'I went up into space and I saw……', 'I went to the railway station and I saw…….' or 'I went to Jurassic Park and I saw…..'

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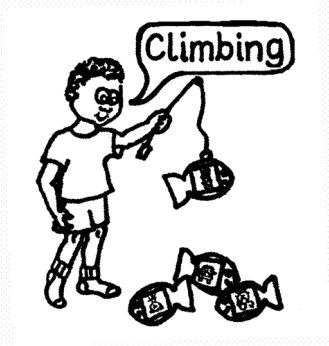
Games to encourage turn taking

Some children can concentrate when they are doing something they enjoy on their own e.g. playing with train models or colouring. Some find it much harder to take turns and play with other adults and children.

Use Special Time to play turn taking games.

1. **Start with simple games.**

- Games with a surprise or reward built into the game.
- Games with only one other person.
- Games where clear turn taking is involved e.g. not Hungry Hippos or Table Football which are fast, noisy and competitive games with no strict system of 'first it's my turn and now it's your turn'.
- Games which only take two or three minutes.

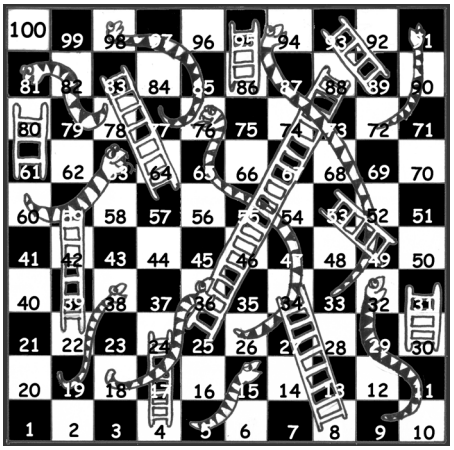


Examples:

- Pop up Pirates
- Magnetic Fishing Game
- Jenga (wooden blocks in a tower)
- Pairs Game
- Skittles

2. **Introduce games with more complex rules** e.g. where you have to pick up a card, spin a dial or throw a dice to determine what you have to do next. The dice games, at this level, should NOT involve forfeits e.g. miss a turn, go back two spaces etc.

Examples: Buckaroo, picture dominoes,



3. **Finally introduce turn taking games that include an element of chance** and that may take more than five minutes

Examples: Snakes and Ladders, Frustration,

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