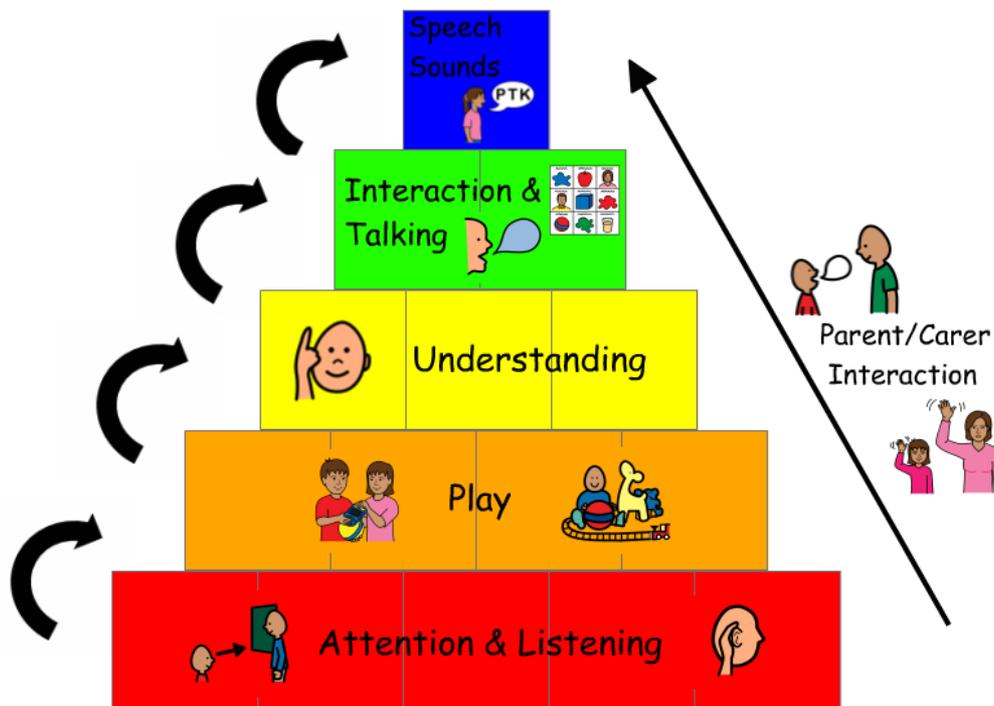


Developing Attention and Listening Skills

Communication is about more than just talking, using your symbols, sign or AAC system to get your message across. Communication also includes the important skills of being able to listen, pay attention, interact, play and understand what is being said. These are the fundamental building blocks of communication. This pack outlines some games and activities that may help young people develop these important skills. Not everyone learns these skills in the same way. Your young person may benefit from alternative strategies such as Intensive Interaction, so please do read our Developing Enjoyment and Shared Attention through Intensive Interaction guide.



Why is attention important?

Children learn to focus their attention on to different things. This usually starts with attending to people and then to objects. They would then typically move on to sharing their attention between people and objects.

The development of attention skills comes before children learn to understand words and to talk. Children need to be able to attend and concentrate so that they can learn new skills, including how to communicate.

Why is listening important?

Children and young people may hear what you say but not listen to what you say. Listening to language involves hearing the words, attending to them and thinking about them.

Children and young people need to be able to listen to and recognise the sounds that make up words and sentences in order to use words and sentences themselves. The different sounds we use in our speech can sound very similar to one another when children are learning language. Children often need to practise listening to a range of different sounds to develop this skill.

Attention and Listening

Ready Steady, Go! Games

Encourage the child to wait until you've said "go" before each turn. Increase the length of time (s)he has to wait for the word, "go".

Car 	Rolling a car between you and the child.
Blocks / stacking cups 	Build a tower of brick/stacking cups and wait for "go" before they can knock it over.
Click clack track 	Play with car click clack track, waiting for "go" before they can send the car down the track.
Balloon 	Slowly blow up a balloon, increasing the time you take to increase attention and then introduce "ready, steady" "GO!" let go of the balloon and watch/chase it as it deflates.
Musical Instruments 	Encourage child to wait for you to say "GO!" before they can play the instrument, extending the waiting period over time.
Spinner 	Take your time to wind up the toy, slowly counting and controlling the length of time you want the child to attend and wait before saying "ready, steady..." leaving gap for child to say "GO!"
Flying saucer 	Take your time to wind the flying saucer, slowly counting and controlling the length of time you want the child to attend before saying "ready, steady..." leaving gap for child to say "GO!"
Bubbles 	Encourage child waits for you to say "go" before they can run to pop the bubbles . Build anticipation with your facial expression, by filling your cheeks ready to blow, waiting a period of time to hold attention and leaving a pause to encourage child to say/indicate "blow".
Swing 	Use anticipation to pull the swing back whilst saying "readyyyyyy, steadyyyyy...." leaving a pause for the child to fill the gap and request "go!" using their words, sign or vocalisations.

Step up:

Encourage expressive communication. Offer choices of two with objects or pictures/symbols of toys.

Tip:

Use a sand timer to visually display how long you will play with the toy/activity.



Taking Turns

Play simple games that will increase the amount of time the child will sit and take turns.

Building tower



Take turns to add a brick to the tower. It might be useful for the adult to be the 'keeper of the bricks'. They can then control the pace of the activity. It also provides opportunity to request bricks. Model language, colours, prepositions "put it on" without expectation for child to use language themselves.

Jigsaw



Take turns to put a piece in the jigsaw. Take your time, ensure there is just enough challenge to ensure the child doesn't rush through the activity but that it's not too hard and they give up. Choose motivating puzzles, perhaps favourite characters or animals. Comment on the picture you are creating. It's a great opportunity to introduce early language items – animals, transport, people, clothes, colours.

Posting pictures



Take turns to post pictures in the post box. You could play hide and seek to find them around the room. It also provides opportunity to introduce vocabulary items. You could put photographs or names on the pictures to promote whose turn it is to post item.

Pop-up Pirate



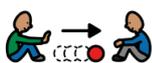
Take turns to remove the swords. Use your facial expression and pace through activity to build anticipation. For older children you can introduce instructions and ask the child to find particular colours.

Connect 4



Older children may enjoy taking turns in commercially available games such as Connect Four. Again, the adult is key in controlling the pace and speed of activity to develop attention and turn taking skills.

Ball



Roll ball to each other. Initially an adult can play this game with their child and then support the child to play with a peer.



Shopping Game



I went to the shops and I bought..... Take turns thinking of something you can buy in the supermarket. Try and remember what the last person said, e.g. Player 1 - "I went to the shops and I bought a banana" Player 2 - "I went to the shops and I bought a banana and ice cream." See how many you can remember between you.

There are many opportunities to encourage turn-taking and sharing during every day routines, particularly if there are brothers and sisters

Sharing toys



Turn to stir cake mix



Turn on the swing



Turn to water garden



Turn to brush hair

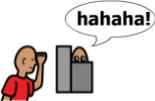


Turn to choose TV programme



Listening Skills

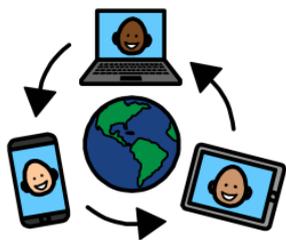
Play gems to develop listening skills.

<p>Make noise</p> 	<p>Make noises with rattles, keys, instruments and see if the child turns to the noise.</p>
<p>Instruments</p> 	<p>Use musical instruments. See if the child can copy the number of beats or shakes.</p>
<p>Hide musical toys</p> 	<p>Hide things that make a noise (wind-up toys, musical toys). See if the child can find the toy by listening to the sound.</p>
<p>Adult hiding</p> 	<p>The adult can hide behind the chair and make a sound such as a cough or giggle. See if the child can find you.</p>
<p>Make shakers</p> 	<p>Make your own shakers and listen to the different sounds. Make multiple shakers and see if the child can find two that sound the same.</p>
<p>Environment noise</p> 	<p>Use a wooden spoon to bang different surfaces, for example, the bottom of a plastic mixing bowl, bottom of a pan, the floor, a metal table leg. Listen to the different sounds. Bang along to the rhythm of the song.</p>
<p>Listening Walk</p> 	<p>Go for a Listening Walk- talk about all the sounds you can hear, such as birds singing, cars 'brrruming', people chattering, and phones ringing. You could have pictures to tick off the things you hear on your walk.</p>
<p>Musical Bumps</p> 	<p>Encourage our child to dance to the music then bump to the floor when the music stops.</p>
<p>Sound Lotto</p> 	<p>You can download applications on some mobile phones, look on the internet or you could buy/make one. Play the sounds and see if the child can point to the picture that matches the sound.</p>
<p>Musical statues</p> 	<p>Encourage the child to listen for when the music stops and then stop dancing.</p>
<p>Simon says</p> 	<p>Encourage the child to listen to the instruction before carrying out the action, for example, clap your hands, touch your nose, stamp our feet.</p>

Shared Attention

Develop enjoyment in shared attention

<p>Action songs/rhymes</p> 	<p>Sing songs together such as “Wind the Bobbin Up” or “The Wheels on the Bus” and encourage child to join in and copy the actions.</p> <p>Leave pauses in the song so that child has a chance to fill in the gaps.</p>
<p>Share story</p> 	<p>Look at books together and encourage the child to sit, listen and join in with their favourite parts and lines of the story. You could take turns to pass the book back and forth when reading aloud.</p>



In the hi-tech world we live it of course we need to consider the use of computers, tablets (iPads) and screen time in general. As we know these technologies are highly motivating for our children and young people. They would attend to them for a long periods of time given the option and availability!

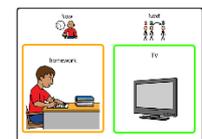
It’s not to say that all ‘screen time’ is detrimental as given appropriate content and used the right context it can be of benefit. However, research shows that to be of most benefit apps/programmes should be interactive, responsive to a child’s actions and preferably a positive shared experience with a care giver, rather than an inactive activity (Barr & Lerner, 2014).

What we know for certain is that children learn language and develop communication through watching, hearing and engaging in interactions with their care giver. They learn through copying, play and enjoyment in these experiences. Therefore, it’s important to ensure there is a balance between the use of technology and the important hands on interactions, games, activities and play.



Some parents report that having a set time for ‘screen time’ helps everyone understand when it’s time for technology. Some use an iPad symbol on a timeline or a rule of iPad only after dinner.

Many young people will find it useful to have a visual reminder of how long they can use technology. A sand timer can be useful for this or a Now and Next board.



Sleep counsellors encourage parents to be mindful and reduce the use of technology before bed and to keep devices out of the bedroom.