

Effective Listeners

It's a chicken and egg business – the better the linguistic comprehension, the better the child will be able to listen and learn from listening, which in turn will improve their language; the two are interlinked.

Attending, listening and understanding are closely linked skills:

- You can't listen until you have learnt to pay sustained attention to the person who is talking.
- You can't understand what is said without having the ability to listen to streams of sound and hold onto the information for long enough to decide if you recognise the words and know what they mean.

Listening is a two-way activity; maintaining attention makes demands on both partners.

Therefore it is easier with fewer partners in the group – one-to-one then small groups before larger groups.

It is easier if a child is prepared for what they will be listening to, without having heard the whole.

Visual aids may be useful in the very early years but may divide attention and make discrimination harder because of the additional visual cognitive demand.

Perhaps a better way to support effective listening is to consider how we maintain attention with younger children – e.g. pace, pitch and intonation plus allowing time to process input.

Effective listeners need to be able to:

- concentrate on the person talking and ignore the distractions around them including background noise
- think about what is said and not go off on one's own train of thought (in a group, the main speaker can't monitor individuals as closely and so the listeners need to have more attention control.)
- locate the new speakers, tune into their voices and if they are other children, probably follow language that is not as clear or well-structured as an adult's speech.
- understand the language that is being used, not every word but enough to keep up with the flow
- pick out the important points and focus on those
- hold onto the information, at least for several minutes, even in the first years of education

- listen to other people's questions and contributions and match them against one's own ideas or undertake other tasks alongside listening

i.e. they need to be a proactive listener

There are so many opportunities throughout the day – we need to identify and exploit them

Need to create a reasonable balance between supporting current learning and access to the curriculum with the development of more mature listening & learning skills to ensure increasing independence.

Remember: Executive Function i.e. the ability to integrate various functions effectively is not fully developed until adulthood; this will have an impact on the type of listening and learning demands that you can make on the child. Remember children cannot listen like adults (e.g. lack of auditory closure).

Be a good listener yourself and model it explicitly.

NB "You" may be a ToD / TA / mainstream teacher or family member – it's everyone's responsibility to promote and support listening skills.