

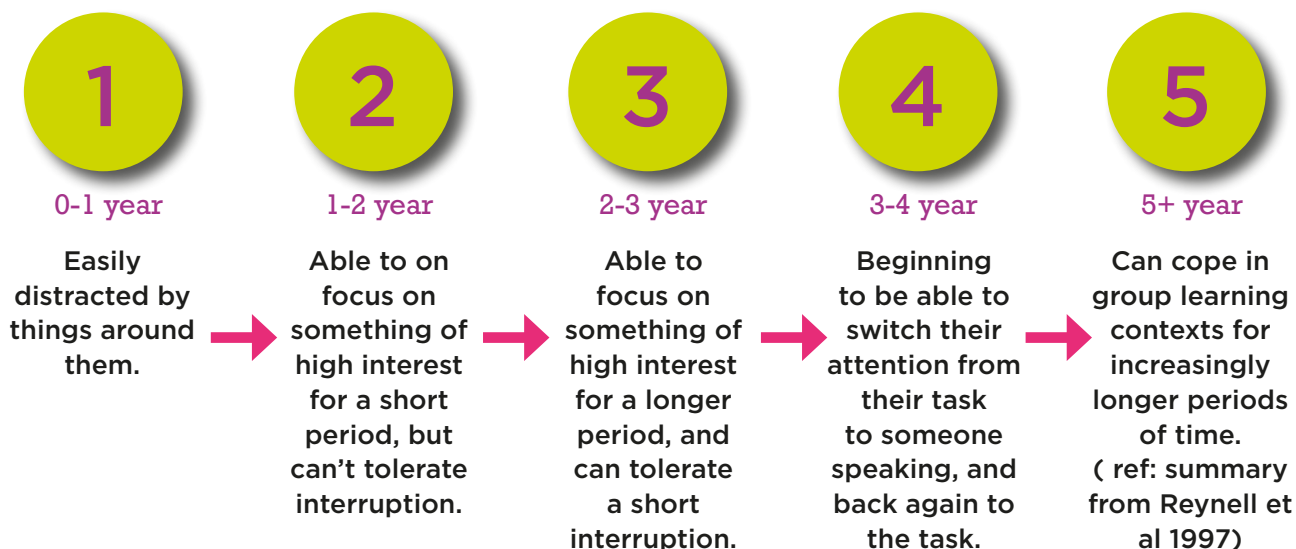


Help Kids Talk and our partners take a collective approach to encouraging the speech, language and communication of our babies, children and young people. We believe everyone within our communities, organisations and settings can play a valuable role in supporting our children's speech, language and communication development. We know that making small changes can have a big impact and that the best outcomes are achieved when babies, children and young people spend time in environments where values and priorities are conducive to implementing these changes.

The development of attention and listening skills

All children take some time to develop their attention and listening skills. We can help children develop their attention and listening skills by first identifying what stage they are at and then supporting them to move on to the next stage. Babies have fleeting attention, with their focus moving from one thing to the next very quickly. Toddlers are gradually able to focus on toys or items of interest to themselves for increasing lengths of time. As they get a little older, many children can then share attention with an adult - perhaps with a toy, a book or an activity.

The stages of attention and listening development.



Attention and listening is one of the topics included in our LEVEL ONE training, which is FREE and can be booked ONLINE on our website. This training is suitable for parents, carers and practitioners.

Some children have difficulties with attention and listening, and they need **EXTRA** support. It's always helpful if parents and education staff work in partnership, sharing information about what works best for each particular child and helping the child

(and other children) recognise that this is not 'bad behaviour' but simply an area of difficulty for them. They will have many strengths as well! Try to make learning a positive, fun experience for them. To best help children and young people who have



difficulties with attention and listening, we need to adapt our expectations and how we do things. The following ideas can really help!

- Make sure you have the child or children's attention before talking to them, e.g. by calling their name.
- Keep your language simple and your instructions short.
- Break up activities into short achievable chunks so that your child can celebrate **COMPLETING** a task, rather than having to leave tasks unfinished.
- Provide regular **MOVEMENT** breaks between activities that require your child to focus their attention and listening - e.g. if your child has to sit to complete their homework, just ask them to do a little bit then get them to do some star jumps, or run and tap the wall a couple of times, before returning to their task.
- Do some **pushing or pulling activities** - e.g. get your child to push up against the wall, do push ups or pull a heavy laundry basket.
- Use **visuals or lists** to help your child complete
- Some children benefit from using a **fidget** toy or a bit of blue tack which can help maintain their focus and attention for longer periods of time.
- Some children benefit from moving **WHILST** completing activities - the physical activity helps support them focus their attention! They might want to jump when saying each letter when doing spellings, or when saying their tables.
- Even though a child may struggle to focus on one thing at a time, they will be noticing lots of things going on around them. **Acknowledge the strengths** in being able to pay attention to lots of things at the same time!
- **Remember to recognise the child's other abilities** - of which there will be many - and **praise** and **encourage** them for that! Do not **JUST** focus on whether or not they are paying attention - remember this is a very difficult thing for them to do!
- **Give lots of verbal praise and tangible rewards** e.g. star charts, ping pong balls in a jar etc

Some children, particularly those with neuro-diverse conditions, may develop their attention and listening in a different way. They can become hyper-focused on something that grabs their attention and so it can take them longer to move their attention from one activity to another.

Check out our Bitesize Series on Attention and Listening to hear from some parents and a young adult about things that worked well for them.

Check out the Help Kids Talk downloadable resources on visual supports available on our website

Check out our website and subscribe to our mailing list so you don't miss out on any new developments.



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