

CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

Listening and Understanding



What You Need to Know

Toddlers are making great strides in their ability to listen, understand, and communicate their wants, needs, and ideas. While their development is naturally interwoven, each area can be intentionally focused upon and supported. This skill specifically focuses on children's ability to listen to and understand directions, books, and stories, or other content presented within the classroom.

Many times, what we do to support children's listening and understanding will not feel that different from what we do when we encourage children's communication and speaking. For example, you can support children's growing communication skills by using "teacher talk" – including narrating your actions and children's actions, repeating what children say, and elaborating on what children say. You can use this same strategy to guide children's *thinking* and support them to use their own language to make sense of information and activities that are occurring around them.

Things to Consider

Long before children speak words, they understand and attend to words and their meanings. As their language develops, they will continue to understand more than they can say with their own words. They communicate this understanding through facial expressions, intonation of vocal expressions, and gestures.

Development of Children's Listening and Understanding

| Between 9 and 18 months, children may: | Between 16 and 36 months, children may: |
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| Show understanding of the meaning of familiar caregivers' verbal and nonverbal communication, and respond with facial expressions, gestures, and words or actions, such as looking at people or objects being referred to. | Show understanding by responding to simple questions or following comments and suggestions with actions or behaviors. |
| Follow simple directions. | Show comprehension of simple sentences. |
| | Show interest, understanding, or enjoyment when participating in language activities or when joining in games, songs, rhymes, or stories. |
| | Comprehend an increasing number of words or signs. |

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of children's listening and understanding:

- ◆ Tell stories that include important story details such as when, who, what happened, characters' feelings, the problem, solution, and resolution.
- ◆ Play listening games, for example:
 - *Simon Says*, *Red Rover*, or *Me Too* (e.g., stand up if you are wearing red and/or tennis shoes).
 - *Telephone* – take turns listening and responding to pretend phone conversations.
- ◆ Read books and provide gestures or props to use while listening (e.g., when a child hears a certain word, they should motion the gesture for that word or wave the object they have related to a key word or character).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Listening and Understanding

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| OBSERVE | OBSERVE Carefully observe children and their understanding of language (refer to developmental chart above). How do they show you what they know/understand? Do some follow your directions and respond accurately to your comments or questions? Who may need some extra support? |
| FOCUS | Use Gestures and/or Visual Supports to Encourage Listening Focus children's attention by providing gestures and visual supports to encourage listening. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "Let's sing our good morning song. While we sing, we can use our bodies to help show what the song is about. This song is about saying hello. So, each time we hear the word, 'hello,' we can wave our hands like this (<i>demonstrate</i>)."◆ "When we listen, our eyes are open (<i>gesture your hands over your eyes like something opening</i>), our mouths are quiet (<i>make a gesture like buttoning your lips shut</i>), and our ears are ready (<i>tug on your ears</i>). Let's do it together!" |
| SCAFFOLD I | Ask and Answer Questions to Support Understanding Prompt children to think about a song or story using questions. Remember, for toddlers you may end up answering your own question, but the question is a means of guiding their thinking and capturing their attention. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "Oh look, the umbrella is floating away! How did the umbrella get up in the air? What did the book tell us is blowing?"◆ "Now all the animals are following them home, but they don't see them! Do you think they will be surprised when they turn around? What might they say?" |
| SCAFFOLD II | Ask Children to Summarize or Retell Information Prompt children to repeat back something that was just said as a way of checking and reinforcing their understanding. And/or, have them summarize or retell the events or activity just completed. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ "Remember, we have two things to do when we get up: put our brushes in the sink and wash our hands! Now you tell me, what do we need to do when we get up?"◆ "We just took care of our class pet. What did we do to take care of our fish?" |
| KEEP IT GOING | Consider what you learned from observing children as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines. |