



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Learning to Listen

All parents hope their kids will listen, follow directions, and work well with others. But following directions is a skill. It takes time to grow this skill in the early years. Here are some tips to help your child learn to listen!

Tell stories.

Children have lots of experience with stories with pictures in books or on screens. Try changing things up by telling your child a story! Use descriptive language to tell about something you did as a child. Tell stories about made-up adventures of a little child who looks like them. Make up stories about dinosaurs, fairies, or talking dogs. Learning to pay attention to the story being told is a great skill for children.

Play listening games.

With your 3- to 5-year-old, hide an object somewhere in the room. Give your child verbal clues to find it: "It's close to the couch. It's under a pillow. It's under the *red* pillow. Can you find it?" Let your child give *you* clues!

Remember that young children will need one direction at a time at first.

"Please pick up the paper on the floor." "Thanks. Now, please put it in the trash."

Explain your reasons.

By the age of three, most children understand language well enough to handle simple explanations. Point out how following directions benefits the whole family. "When you help me put away the laundry, I finish quicker and then we can play."

Use a quiet voice for important info.

Often yelling or loud voices causes children to shut down. Get down to your child's level. Try a quiet, serious voice (even a whisper!): "The car seat keeps you safe. It's time to get buckled up." Say what you need them to do in clear, simple words. Then ask them to repeat it back to you to help it stick.



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If your child isn't listening, it's not because they're "bad."

If you call across the room and your child doesn't respond, it can be frustrating. But the truth is, they probably didn't hear you. Young children get very focused on what they are doing. They are deep in their own world. A soft touch on the shoulder, getting down to their level, and making eye contact can help them focus on what you're saying.

Do chores together.

Let your child experience chores as a family. Together you can set the table, clean up toys, or wash the car. Give simple instructions: "Put the plastic containers in the drawer." Model how to do it, if needed. Explain the benefits: "Look how fast we set the table. Now we have time for a walk before dinner."

Be specific.

"Clean up your toys" isn't very clear. But "put your blocks in the bin and books in the basket" tells children exactly what they should do.

Model good listening yourself.

Children notice everything. If you want them to listen to you, it is important for *you* to listen to *them*. Our phones can be a big distraction. Try to reduce phone use. Put your phone down so you can fully focus on and listen to your child.

Notice your child's cooperation.

Point out why their listening was a good thing. "You held my hand in the parking lot when I asked you to. You stayed safe! That is so important." Or, "You waited to pet the dog while I asked permission. That was such good listening! You should be proud."

Have more questions?

Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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