

Especially for parents of toddlers!

Listen Up!

Talking and Listening

One of the most important skills your toddler needs to learn is how to listen. To become good speakers and readers, toddlers need to be able to hear when sounds are the same or different. Toddlers also need to understand what other people are saying to them.

What is the practice?

You can help your toddler develop strong listening skills by playing games that involve both words and sounds. When you give her many everyday opportunities to practice listening skills you help her with listening, speaking, and ultimately, reading.

What does the practice look like?

Help your toddler pay attention to what he hears with fun parent-child activities. Play listening games such as *Simon Says* and *Follow the Leader*. Do the motions to songs, stories, and fingerplays. Act out the differences in sounds that are fast, slow, loud, soft, and more.

How do you do the practice?

As with all skills, toddlers learn to listen best when they take an active part doing things they like to do. This is especially true when you, as a parent, eagerly join in on listening games with your toddler.

- *Simon Says* is a powerful game. Children learn body parts, direction words (*up, down, etc.*), and words that describe something (*fast, slow, etc.*). Give your child the chance to take turns playing the role of Simon as well as listening.
- Play games that call for your toddler to listen to speech differences. Examples might include whispering and shouting, talking quickly and slowly, and making his voice high and low. When he hears a difference, ask him to tell you *how* two sounds are different.
- Recite short poems, songs, or nursery rhymes with (or for) your child and ask her to act them out. Fingerplays with movement are also good ways to build listening skills while keeping toddlers interested.
- Help your toddler listen for single sounds by drawing out words very slowly. Ask her to speed the words up, or say them just as slowly as you did. Stress rhyming words in songs or poems. Point out sounds that are the same or different as you read together.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler enjoy playing listening games like *Simon Says*?
- Is he beginning to point out the difference between loud and soft noises and other opposites?
- Does she act out movements that go along with the words in stories, poems, or songs?

Take a look at more “Listen Up!” activities

Rhyming Song

Ada, who is nearly 3 years old, loves music and dancing. She likes to have her mom help her sing *Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*, while they make the motions together. They start slowly, with Ada remembering where to put her hands for each word she hears. Once she gets it right all the way through, her mom says, “Great job! Should we do it faster?” Ada laughs and nods, and they speed up the rhyme a little bit each time they do it. Soon Ada hardly has time to touch the right body parts. Sometimes her mom makes a mistake on purpose to see if Ada will catch it. Ada always does. She knows the song well by now and loves being able to correct her mom.



Listen and Ride

Two-year-old Tye and his big brother, Eric, are playing on the sidewalk with their mom. The boys are riding their trikes around wildly. Their mom decides to make up a game. “Okay, boys,” she says. “I’m the police officer. You have to start and stop your bikes when I tell you to. Here’s the starting line.” She calls out directions for them: “Ride fast! Peddle as fast as you can!” or “Peddle very slowly, this is a danger zone.” Sometimes she makes them stop or start. The boys laugh, seeing how quickly they can obey the “police officer’s” orders. After a few minutes, Tye says, “I get to be the policeman.” They take turns being in charge, with the other players listening to the pretend officer.

Listen and Seek

Sean, a toddler with language delays, loves playing a special game with his mom. They pick a few of Sean’s favorite toys—a stuffed kitten, a dog, a ball, and a book. They take them into a bedroom. Sean closes his eyes for a minute while his mom hides one of the toys. “Okay,” Mom says. “Look for the spotted kitty.” Sean runs around the room searching behind shelves, under pillows and quilts, and in the closet for the stuffed kitten. His mom gives him hints: “Look under the chair.” When Sean finds the kitty, it’s his turn to pick the toy to hide while his mom closes her eyes.

