

Language and Literacy for 2-4 year olds

A child's attention level develops in the stages shown below. Each individual child functions at these stages at different times in their development, no two children are the same.

0 - 11 months - Fleeting attention

The child is easily distracted and flits from one thing to another.

8 - 20 months - Rigid attention

The child can concentrate on a task of their own choice, but they cannot tolerate interruption by an adult. The child may therefore appear wilful or obstinate.

22 - 36 months - Single-channelled attention

The child cannot cope with doing one thing and listening to an instruction about something else all at the same time. If an adult wants to give an instruction, the child must be asked to stop their activity, listen to the adult and then return to their chosen task.

30 - 50 months - Focusing attention

The child is gradually beginning to control their own focus of attention but can still only concentrate on one thing at a time; the task or the unrelated instruction. However, the child can now shift their focus of attention from one to the other without an adult helping them to do this.

40 - 60 months - Two-channelled attention

Attention is now two-channelled: the child can do a task and understand an instruction at the same time. The child's concentration span may still be short.

60+ months - Integrated attention

Two-channelled attention is now well established across different situations with different people involved in the child's life.



Activities to encourage listening and attention:

Run and touch

This is best played outside.

Identify four or five different things outside, e.g. climbing frame, gate, seat, and tree.

Say 'Run to the ...'

When the children can do this, add another, e.g. 'Run to the tree and then the gate.'

Silly stories

Warn the children that you, or a puppet, are going to make mistakes as you read a story and they have to spot them.

Read a familiar story and make errors. How many can the children spot?

Personalised stories

Make up a story about the children and every time you say one of their names they have to stand up.

This is more effective in small groups of between four and six children.

Make this harder by suggesting that every time the children hear a boy's name all the boys must stand up and every time they hear a girl's name all the girls must stand up.

Hide and seek

The children hide up to eight objects around the room or outside.

Ask each child to find the one you ask for. Some children may benefit from being given a picture/photo of the item to find.

When a child can do this, ask them to find two.

Tick-tock

Hide a clock or something else that makes a constant sound.

One child has to find it.

Go!

Give instructions but the children must wait until you say 'go'.

Vary the time interval between the instructions and saying 'go'.

Gradually make the instructions harder.

Examples of instructions to start with:

Touch your toes – go! Jump up and down three times – go!

Put one hand behind your back – go! Clap your hands slowly – go!

Bear hunt

Explain that you are going to a forest to find bears. Tell the children how many bears they have to find. Start with two or three. For younger children give them a card strip with pictures of two or three bears on it. Name all sorts of animals you might see in a forest and every time you say 'Bear!', each child puts a counter on a picture of a bear on their card strip.

The children shout 'Found them!' when they have the right number of bears to stop the game.

Vary the animal and the place, e.g. find two or three worms in the garden.

Walking through the jungle

Say the introductory rhyme and add an animal. The children make the associated noise and action. Say ... 'Walking through the jungle ... what do I see? I see a monkey looking at me!'

Picture skittles

Stick pictures on skittles or plastic bottles.

Name a picture and each child, in turn, tries to knock down the matching skittle.

To make this harder give a clue rather than naming the object, e.g. 'Something you use to paint with'.

I-spy

This is best played outside.

It is a variation of the traditional 'I spy ...' but give a clue, e.g. 'I spy with my little eye something that grows and has leaves.' (Make sure you don't look at it while you give the clue or the child will work it out by watching your eyes rather than listening!)

Things to consider at home...

Poor listening and attention can be very difficult for you as parents/carers at home as it can often be interpreted as a challenging behaviour. Considering the following questions, can have positive outcomes:



Can you reduce background noise at home?

Is there TV/music/other background noise on all the time?

Can background noise be reduced?



What is your child watching?

Is it appropriate?

Can you watch a programme together and talk about it afterwards?

Could the shared experience lead to sharing a magazine, book or playing with a toy, based on the programme content?



Do you encourage quiet times?

Is there any chance for 1:1 quiet time?

How do you spend quiet time with your child?

Could you share a favourite story or talk on the way to pre-school?

