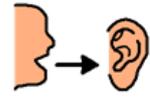# Listening and attention

Listening skills are important for helping young children to understand and use words. Listening not only involves hearing the words, but thinking about them too. Children need to be able to filter out other sounds and distractions, and focus their attention on the important information.

Children go through different stages of listening and attention as they develop. Children at an earlier stage of development or those with listening and attention difficulties may have difficulty following instructions. They may appear to ignore you or be easily distracted; they may struggle to sit still or flit between activities. These children may require support to develop their listening and attention skills.

Strategies for listening and attention:

- **Reduce distractions**. Where possible, reduce distractions such as background noise. Having the TV or radio on all the time, for example, can make it difficult to know which sounds are the most important to listen to.

- Get down to your child's level. Being **face to face** with you will make it easier to listen.

- **Say their name** first before speaking or giving an instruction.

- Some children may also need a **direct prompt** to listen. Praise your child for responding to you.

- Use **visual supports**. Our body language, facial expressions and gestures can keep your child engaged. Using visual supports such as objects, pictures and symbols can all reinforce the words we say.

- Talk about listening. Point out the sounds you can hear in your environment (e.g. '*Listen… I can hear a helicopter*').

- **Keep activities short**. Follow your child's lead and move on when they lose interest. Keep activities short, building up the length of time gradually to develop your child's attention span.

- Using activities with defined steps and a clear end point can help develop your child's attention span (e.g. 4 pieces in a jigsaw, 2 pictures that need glued down, etc.).

- Encourage your child to do the last step in an activity so that they can experience the **success** of completing it!