



Listening Summary

Why Listening?

Your infant's healthy development depends upon their ability to listen and understand what you and others are communicating even at these early stages. Listening skills support your infant's ability to engage in healthy relationships, to focus, and to learn.

Step 1. Getting to Know and Understand your Infants **Input**

- Paying close attention to your infant's facial expressions, movements, and sounds helps you understand what they are trying to communicate.
- Your efforts to learn from your infant create empathetic interactions that promote healthy listening skills in you and your infant.
- Check out these common cues and see if they match your infant's feelings and associated needs.
 - If an infant is in pain, their eyes may be closed or may open for a second and look blankly into the distance. Parents often feel a greater sense of urgency with this cry. If it's gas pain, they may scrunch up their face and pull their legs up.
 - If an infant is tired, they may rub their eyes with them closing and opening. They may pull their ears and yawn.
- As you practice, you'll get better at recognizing their style of communication. They will feel a greater sense of your understanding and responsiveness, so that your interactions become more two-way instead of one-way.

Tip Decide on a plan for calming down when you are the only one with your infant. Research shows that infants cry less when their caregiver is less stressed. Ensure your infant's safety, then close your eyes and breathe deeply. A child's crying and frustrations can be challenging, so be sure to take breaks when you need them.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model listening while interacting with your infant. Modeling listening skills can be one of the greatest teaching tools.
 - Share the focus. As you spend time with your infant, follow their lead.
 - Notice gestures and listen for thought and feeling. Attempt to figure out what your infant is trying to tell you through their sounds, gestures, and facial expressions.

- Infants require your attention to thrive. So, why not build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your infant has to tell you? Turn off your phone. Set a timer if needed. Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself, “What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I’m listening?”
- Talk to your infant.
 - Talk clearly and slowly. Exaggerate your words for clarity and understanding. Don’t use “baby talk,” which can be difficult to understand.
 - Label what you see. *“I see a duck. Quack, Quack. Do you see the duck too?”*
- Narrate your daily routines.
 - As you prepare breakfast at home or go shopping together at the store, talk about what you are doing each step of the way.
 - Involve your infant by asking questions. For example, *“I am getting out your favorite cereal box. I think we’ll have some cereal this morning. Does that sound yummy to you?”*

Tip Establish a routine for both you and your infant to calm down when frustrations or upset arise. What will you say? For example, *“I need to calm down.”* What will you do? Keep tools at hand such as a calming app, gentle music, a sound machine, plush animal toys, or soft blankets.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Listening Skills for Healthy Relationships

- Initially, your infant may need active support to encourage listening skills. Engage in listening activities together like listening to a simple audio book or a song and then reflect on what you heard together. *“I heard a tapping beat.”*
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like, *I noticed how you listened to my direction to stay on the rug. That will keep you safe.*
- Making animal noises can be a fun, engaging game for you and your infant as they attempt to match what they hear with their own growing ability to make sounds.
- Read or chant rhymes or poetry to your infant particularly ones with repetitive words or sounds.
- Make music together by putting on a song and offering your infant a rattle, tambourine, or other simple instrument to play along.
- Read together. When you read stories together, you engage in a listening activity that can be deeply connecting for both of you. Reflect on the story, and you’ll take the learning opportunity one step further. *“Do you think Little Red Riding Hood was excited to go to Grandma’s house?”* Involve your infant in selecting the book, holding it, and turning the pages to build ownership and interest in reading.

Step 4. **Support** Your Infant's Development and Success

- Learn about your infant's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones offers you empathy and patience.
- Stay engaged. Trying new listening strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your infant especially when communication becomes challenging.

Step 5. **Recognize** and Celebrate

- Your recognition can go a long way to promoting more positive behaviors and expanding your child's sense of competence.
- Smile at your infant
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your infant.
- Use words to celebrate and encourage. Recognize and call out when all is going well. When your infant is listening and following your instructions, call it out: *"I notice you listened when I asked you to stay away from the stairs. I know you're curious about climbing, and I am glad you are keeping safe."*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Tip The first year is filled with amazing changes -- and not just your child. Don't forget to recognize and celebrate your own development and milestones as a parent.

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