



Listening Summary

Why Listening?

One-year-olds come to better understand themselves through their interactions with you and other caregivers. They are in the process of learning their strengths and limitations, why they feel the way they do, and how they relate to others. Parents and those in a parenting role share in this learning and exploration. This is a critical time to teach and practice listening skills.

Step 1. Getting to Know and Understand Your Child's Input

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *"How do you feel? How do you think I feel?"* One-year-olds do not yet have a feelings vocabulary and are not able to describe their body sensations when they are upset or dealing with any big feeling. They will need your support to be successful.
 - For example, if your child is making a disagreeable facial expression, say, *"Freeze,"* like a game. Pull out the mirror, ask them to repeat the face, and ask about what that facial expression represents. For example, *"Your eyebrows are squished down, and there's a line in your forehead. Are you feeling mad?"*
- When reading books, look at the images of children or animals and guess the feelings by asking, *"What do you think this character is feeling?"*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how others are feeling -- or buried in their own feelings -- help them by sharing what you think others are feeling. You could say: *"I wonder if that person is feeling sad because their head is hanging down and their mouth is frowning. Do you think they feel sad?"* Or, *"I think that person might be feeling angry because their face is red and their eyebrows are scrunched up. Do you think they feel angry?"*
- Practicing naming emotions will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it. This can help reduce the length and strength of tantrums as your child gains emotional competence.

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model listening while interacting with your child. Modeling listening skills can be one of the greatest teaching tools.
 - Share the focus. As you spend time with your child, follow their lead. As they pick up new toys or explore a different part of the room, move, notice, and name what they are exploring.¹

- Notice gestures and listen for thought and feeling. Attempt to figure out what your child is trying to tell you through their sounds, gestures, and facial expressions. When they are expressing a feeling on their face or through their body, name it. *"I noticed your face is red and your shoulders are tense. You look angry."*
- Children 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 child 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 child.
 - 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. What does a duck say?"*
- Narrate your feelings. As you are going through your bedtime routine, talk about what you are doing each step of the way. Involve your child by asking questions. For example, you might say, *"I just yawned and am feeling sleepy. Do you think I should take a nap?"*
- 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 child by asking questions. For example, *"I am getting out your favorite cereal bowl. I think we'll have some cereal this morning. Does that sound yummy to you?"*

Step 3. Practice to Grow Listening Skills for Healthy Relationships

- Your daily conversations can be opportunities for your child to practice new vital skills if you seize those chances. Each time your child works hard to practice essential listening skills, they grow vital new brain connections that strengthen and eventually form habits.
- Initially, your child 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 clapping."*
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like, *"I noticed how you listened to my direction to stay away from the stairs. That will keep you safe."*
- Making animal sounds can be a fun, engaging game for you and your child as they attempt to match what they hear with their own growing ability to make sounds.
- There are a number of games and songs that require strong listening skills. Offer practice by playing these games with your child. For example, making music requires listening particularly if you introduce it as a game. *"Let's dance or play along with our instruments."* Playing along helps a child attune their beats and tones with the sounds they are hearing. Household pots, pans, and spoons can serve as ideal instruments with which to experiment.
- Read or chant rhymes or poetry to your child -- particularly ones with repetitive words and sounds.
- 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 child in selecting the book, holding it, and turning the pages to build ownership and interest in reading.

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

- Learn about your child'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 child especially when communication becomes challenging.

Trap When your child does not listen to you or is clearly focusing elsewhere, you might be tempted to scold or nag but be sure and give them additional chances. We all lose our focus sometimes. Get down on their level, eye to eye, and review what you said again to help them refocus their attention. End with a smile or hug to reinforce your connection.

Step 5. **Recognize** and Celebrate

- Smile at your child.
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your child.
- Use words to celebrate and encourage. Recognize and call out when all is going well. When your child is listening and following your instructions, call it out: *"I notice you listened when I asked you to back away from the stove. I know you're curious, 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 This year is filled with amazing changes -- and not just for your child. Don't forget to recognize and celebrate your own development and milestones as a parent.

References

1. Harvard University Center on the Developing Child. (2019). *How To: 5 Steps for Brain-Building Serve and Return [video]*. Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-retur>

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