



# First Steps

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## Who's Listening?

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Eighty percent of all new facts are gained through our ears, not our eyes. Therefore, hearing everything that is said, and missing little, is an essential skill. But it is a skill, not a natural gift. Parents must teach children to listen. Just as children must learn how to read, they must also learn how to listen. "Children must listen to learn, and learn to listen. Learning how to follow directions is one way children learn to listen. To help your child understand the directions you give him, point and use other gestures." Source: Dougherty, How to Talk to Your Baby

### The "five fingers" of listening:

- 1) Heads up
- 2) Ears open
- 3) Eyes on the speaker
- 4) Mouth closed
- 5) Pay attention



### Children can concentrate on what is being said more easily when they—

- look the speaker in the eye.
- think about what the speaker is saying.
- remain quiet.
- are not distracted by other noises.

### Develop your child's listening from an early age.

- As soon as your child can understand a fairy tale or story, ask him questions about it.
- Play listening games with your child. Even simple games can help her learn to listen better and to do better in school.
- Model active listening by looking at your child while he talks.
- Ask your child to repeat what she heard you say, and talk about what information she might have missed.



**“Hearing the differences between sounds, or auditory discrimination, is a critical link to reading.** Begin early, and give your child experience listening to many different sounds. Comment on the sounds around you: ‘Listen to the clock ticking.’ Or ask: ‘Do you hear that airplane? Is it loud?’ Talk about the sounds your child makes when he splashes in the tub, claps his hands, and stomps his feet. Bang with spoons, or drop blocks into different containers. Plastic, metal, and cardboard containers all make different sounds.”

Source: Dougherty, How to Talk to Your Baby



## Fun ways to improve your child's listening

- Go outside and see how many different sounds you can identify. (Birds, cars, dogs, children, etc.)
- Say a list of five objects to your child, and then ask him to repeat that list in the order in which you gave it. Work on it daily until he can name all of the objects in the correct order.
- Play “Simon Says” with your child.
- Make animal sounds and have your child repeat the sounds you make.
- Sing a few words of a song and have your child sing them back to you.
- Read your child a story; then, have her tell you the basic plot. Doing this will help her memory skills, too, which is an important part of listening.
- Give a list of three items for your child to find. When he is able to do this, give him a list of four objects.
- Repeat nursery rhymes and play music



## Why is it difficult to stay focused while listening?

People’s minds wander while they are listening because the human brain thinks about four times faster than the human tongue can speak. The huge gap between the speed of the mind and the words being heard provides time for all sorts of distracting personal thoughts. By helping young children listen and think only about what the speaker is saying will help them throughout their lives. As they get older, it will help them to get the most out of a lecture and take better notes. Source: Schwartz, How to Double Your Child’s Grades in School

*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*