

### Encouraging Listening Skills in Children

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When childcare workers and children are together, the use of language to communicate is varied. Throughout the day the adult continually needs to give children information, direction and instructions. How this is done will affect the growth of the child's language as well as increased listening skills. What words we use and how we use them play an important part in communication. If our words are vague, not within the child's vocabulary or words are not being spoken clearly and concisely children become confused, disinterested and in some instances appear to be disruptive and disobedient. All children are different. It is important to observe each child as well as gaining information about the child from the parents. The following strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the inclusion process. This list is only the start and it is dependant on a variety of factors such as environment, length of time child is in care, child's interest, likes, dislikes, skills already achieved.

#### Suggested Strategies

- **Pay attention to being clear, direct and precise in your instructions.** – think about what you want the children to hear.
- **Identify what information is important** –for example, if it relates to safety, turn taking, etc.
- **Think about the words you use.** – ensure your language is age appropriate.
- **Assume if a child does not follow the directions then the child did not understand** – repeat what you have said in a different way. Allow time for children to process what you have said.
- **Check with the children that they understand what you have said or asked** – for example, “Does everyone know what I need you to do?” and allow the children to respond.
- **What ever the situation, the more specific your direction the more likely you will have success.**
- **Avoid only using abstract concepts** – for example, “I want you to behave at mat time” to “You need to sit quietly on the floor and don't touch anyone else. Please be quiet so that everyone can hear the story”
- **Think of the abstract words you use (e.g. be kind, listening ears, walking feet). These are abstract words that without explanation mean nothing to children.** - “That's not polite” or even “we need manners at the table” does not give the child enough information about what the expectation is. Instead use phrases such as “at the table we wait until we have finished what is in our mouth before we speak” helps with the understanding of what “needing manners” is.
- **Practice makes perfect** – children need reinforcement each day and staff can expect to be repeating the same information a number of times until the child grasps the concept.
- **Avoid using questions that imply choice when there is none** – e.g. “Would you like to pack up the puzzle now?” can be said differently such as “Do you need some help to pack up the puzzle?”
- **Use statements, not questions, when you expect the children to comply** – don't offer a choice when there isn't one.

#### **References:**

Mooney C.G. “Use your Words” How teacher talk help children learn. Redleaf Press 2005 USA

Communicating effectively with Children [www.extension.missouri.edu](http://www.extension.missouri.edu)

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