

# BASIC LISTENER SKILLS

## GOAL

Learn to teach basic listener skills while making it fun and motivating for your child to follow simple directions.

## BACKGROUND

Basic listener skills require 2 people, a speaker and a listener. For the purposes of this training, we will focus on the listener's physical response to what the speaker says. We cover a verbal response to someone else's verbal communication in a different lesson.

The speaker says something such as "touch the dog" and the listener responds by performing some action on the environment that corresponds with what the speaker said.

Most listener skills you will teach involve either touching or pointing to something in the environment as you saw in the previous example or performing some sort of action with his body.

## MAKE FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS FUN!

As with other skills, you begin by teaching listener skills that are easy for your child and build to more complex skills. This creates a positive experience and allows you to provide frequent reinforcement.

Choose targets that are fun and enjoyable on their own. Play games like follow the leader and Simon Says. Take turns with your child and allow him to give directions and be the leader.

Make sure to have plenty of reinforcers around to keep him motivated. Choose reinforcers that are time-limited to create more opportunities to practice basic listener skills with your child.

# CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS

When choosing what to teach first, start with things that your child is already at least a little familiar with to give him the greatest chance for success. If he's likely to want the items you decide to teach first, use pictures of those items instead of the real items.

## PROGRESS THROUGH DIFFERENT TYPES OF TARGETS AS YOUR CHILD'S SKILLS IMPROVE

### Objects

Begin with teaching your child to identify common objects as a listener. Use either small versions of the actual object or pictures of the object. If your child has special interests, start with pictures of some of those objects, if possible.



### Body Parts

Build to teaching your child to identify various body parts as a listener. He should be able to identify facial features as well as larger body parts such as his legs. Try the song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes to make it fun.



### Actions

Begin by teaching simple actions that you can help him with such as clap, wave or point and gradually move to actions you will need to model to teach such as dance, stomp or jump.



### One-Step Directions

Gradually introduce simple one-step directions such as "go get your shoes" or "put your bowl in the sink." These directions are likely to be less fun and motivating on their own, so make sure to have reinforcers ready!

# TEACH SIMPLE LISTENER SKILLS

## Check for the skill

To get started, place a small number of items or pictures in front of your child. Usually, it's best to start with 2 or 3 but if this is hard for him, you could start with just 1.

Place the items in front of your child, wherever he chooses to play. Make sure he sees the reinforcers you have available, get his attention, and say, "touch the..."

It's best to check to see if he can do this on his own before you decide to teach him. If he touches the dog on his own, you can move on to other targets, or try increasing the array by adding another item or picture and check to see if he can still respond correctly.

If the speaker says "touch the dog" and the listener touches the rabbit, the listener made an error. This is an indication that you might need to do some teaching, especially if this type of error happens frequently.

## Teaching and prompting

When teaching your child to respond correctly, you will begin by physically guiding your child to the correct answer. If possible, it's best to guide your child to the correct answer before he actually makes an error. If you see his hand move toward the wrong answer, immediately correct him before he has the opportunity to touch the wrong one. It's a minor distinction, but an important one.

As your child begins to improve in his response, you can begin to reduce the amount of help you give him. Do this gradually so he doesn't make mistakes.

Eventually move from guiding his hand to simply pointing to the correct answer , then pointing in the direction of the correct answer.

Keep fading back until he answers correctly without any help from you.

# MAKE THE TASK MORE DIFFICULT

Gradually make the task more difficult by adding new targets and increasing the array of items or pictures you put in front of him. Include more items that are similar to each other over time.

Each time you put the items or pictures in front of him, make sure to change their positions so he doesn't learn that "point to dog" means to point to the picture in the middle on the bottom row.

## 3 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Ball
- ✓ Couch

## 4 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Bird
- ✓ Car
- ✓ Chair

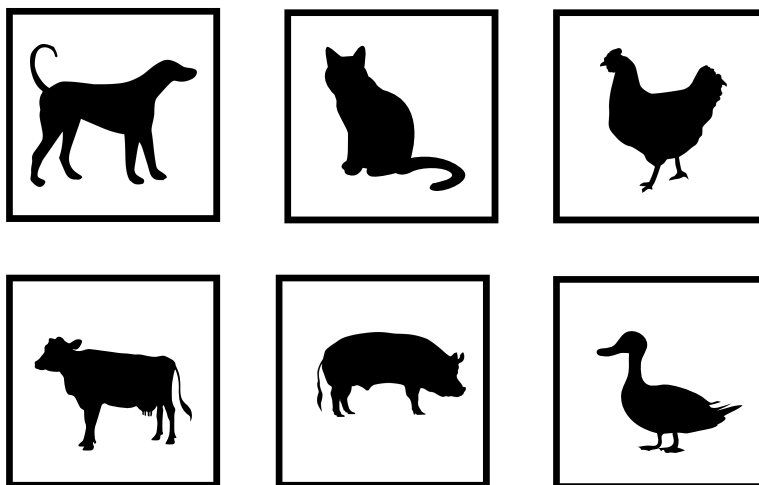
## 6 pictures

- ✓ Dog
- ✓ Cat
- ✓ Chicken
- ✓ Cow
- ✓ Pig
- ✓ Duck

In the example above, "dog" is the target you are teaching. You start by presenting 3 pictures of unrelated objects with "dog" being the only animal. As your child demonstrates improved listener skills, you include more pictures in the array while also introducing objects that are increasingly similar. In this example, you begin to introduce other animals, gradually moving to include animals that are very similar to "dog" such as a cat.

Vary the pictures in the array to make sure your child is learning what the actual target is, not just what it isn't.

Many children also benefit from using multiple examples of the target. In this example, it would include using pictures of different types of dogs.





# TEACH LISTENER RESPONDING TO ACTIONS

## TEACHING ACTIONS

### **Make it fun for your child.**

When starting to teach listener responding with actions, begin with targets that are easy for you to help him do like clap, wave, or point. Be silly and include things he likes to do.

Often the actions and your praise may be sufficient reinforcement; however, some children need additional, tangible reinforcers. Do what works for your child.

Use songs such as Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, A Tooty Ta, or Animal Actions to make following directions enjoyable. If using a video from YouTube, make sure your child doesn't see them modeling the action. Remember, the goal is to teach your child to respond to the words, not imitate the actions.

## FADE THOSE PROMPTS

### **Help your child respond correctly, but reduce help to build independence.**

You can use physical prompts, for some actions, such as clapping. For gross motor movements that you can't help him complete like jumping, it's best to make sure he's able to imitate your movements before trying to teach him to display these actions when you tell him to. Immediately after you give him the direction, model the action. Over time, fade this help so he starts to do it independently.

When asking him to do different things throughout his day, avoid providing additional prompts or cues such as pointing or even looking at what you want him to do. Teach him to pay attention to what you say rather than relying on other cues. If he needs help, go ahead and help him, but then work on fading that help so he begins to become more independent.



# KEEP IT REWARDING

Remember, each child grows and develops at his own rate. Many children are resistant to following directions, even when the directions are to do something fun.

Avoid pressuring your child and create multiple opportunities throughout your child's day to practice. Incorporate your child's special interests when you can.

Teach wherever your child likes to hang out. He doesn't need to sit at a table with his feet on the floor and his hands clasped in front of him to learn.