

Teaching Your Child to Listen

Listening is a learned skill that many of us with typical hearing often take for granted.

Even before your baby is born, your baby is hearing and learning to listen to the world around them.

However, if your child does not have typical hearing, they will miss out on opportunities to learn to listen, hindering their ability to listen and speak.

We can actively teach anyone, especially children with hearing loss, how to listen using a listening model developed by Norman Erber's called Erber's levels of listening.

In 1982, Dr. Erber proposed that listening unfolds with 4 steps – these steps are useful in teaching young children with hearing loss to learn to listen.

The first level of listening is detection. It is the foundation of all listening skills to come.

Detection is the ability to determine whether sound is present or absent. As you will see in this video, when the child hears the grocery store announcement, she immediately looks around to see where the sound is coming from, which demonstrates sound detection.

The second level of listening is discrimination.

Discrimination is the ability to perceive one sound from another. This could be the difference between the sounds /b/ and /p/ or the difference between a dog barking and a cat meowing. Watch in this video as the child listens to her therapist present various words. When the therapist presents two similar words, the child is able to tell the therapist whether the two words are the same word or different words, for example Sit / Seat, Game / Game which demonstrates sound discrimination in this listening environment. "Alright, are you ready?" "Yes" "Ok. Sit, Seat." "Uhm, different." Desk, Desk."

The third level of listening is identification.

Identification is the ability to accurately identify sounds that are present in the listening environment. Typically, the behavior associated with sound identification involves repeating a sound or writing down the sound. In some cases, with young listeners, a clinician may even use listening tasks involving pointing to determine if the child has reached the listening level of identification. In the present video, the girl is accurately repeating back the words that her teacher is saying - Sue, Zoo, Mutt and Mitt, demonstrating she can identify the words she heard.

The final and highest level of listening is comprehension.

Comprehension is the ability to understand the meaning of a sound. When we are thinking about speech, this might mean that your child is able to answer a question, follow instructions, or participate in a conversation. When we are thinking about environmental sounds, when your child hears the doorbell, they know a visitor is at the door. In this video, while the children are playing quietly, the phone rings. The child understands that the ringing sound means that someone is calling, and she should answer the phone.

Let's review!

Detection is the ability to determine whether a sound is present or absent.

Discrimination is the ability to perceive one sound from another.

Identification is the ability to accurately identify sounds that are present in the listening environment.

Comprehension is the ability to understand the meaning of a sound.

Together, these listening skills build on each other and allow for the growth of successful speaking and listening skills.

However, you must remember that learning to listen takes time, practice, patience, and intervention from a trained professional.

Your child will move through the levels as they develop listening skills; however, it is important to note that just because your child has a listening level mastered in a quiet setting does not guarantee success in different listening environments. For example, your child's ability to follow instructions in your quiet living room is very different from their ability to follow instructions in a noisy classroom. Practice and patience are key!

Like any new skill, your child learns to listen from you and the team of professionals helping to guide your child. There are many factors that can influence how quickly your child learns these skills, including but not limited to degree of hearing loss, quality of intervention and frequency of intervention. Depending on these factors and how soon your child's intervention begins, the child can be expected to progress through the listening levels.

Your child will learn to listen and comprehend different sounds – like the microwave's ding or you reading a story – but it takes practice and guidance. Listening skills, you work on across different listening environments will change over time.

You can work with your child's team to plan listening goals that are appropriate for your child's listening level and help them succeed in a variety of different environments. Your team of



professionals will also be able to talk more in depth about how your child can be expected to learn these listening skills, no matter how young or old your child is.

By using Erber's listening hierarchy as a guide, you can help your child grow into a healthy listening and speaking individual.