



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## Building Listening Skills in Children



Listening is a skill that most people believe children learn on their own. However, studies show that children must be taught good listening skills. Listening is more than hearing. It is a process that enables the brain to make meaning from the sounds that are heard. It requires the ability to stay focused on the message, resist distractions, and understand the content of the message. Building good listening skills begin with teaching children to attend to sounds they hear around them.

Building listening skills is important for several reasons:

- ♥ **Good listening skills lead to better learning.** Research has shown that there is a direct relationship between listening and learning. Listening comprehension is considered one of the skills most predictive of overall, long-term school success.

- ♥ **Listening is the foundation for language development and reading success.** In order to be a successful reader, children must be able to distinguish the different sounds in words and have phonological (sound) awareness. Phonological awareness is understanding that sounds can be grouped together to form words.
- ♥ **Listening skills are important for life success.** Good listening skills are needed in order to succeed in relationships, and in a career. Employers identify 'good listening' as one of the top three skills sought in job applicants.

When we build young children's listening skills, we give them a good foundation that will serve them well throughout their lives. In this newsletter, we will discuss ways to promote good listening skills at each age level – infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and highlight activities that give children practice in listening.

### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

From the earliest days of life, most newborns' sense of hearing is fully functioning. Even in utero, a developing infant is capable of hearing as soon as his hearing organs are completely formed. At birth, infants prefer adult voices to other sounds. You may notice your newborn baby listening and responding to your voice and singing. As he listens to the words and sounds around him, his brain is actively making neural connections.



Here are some ways you can help your infant develop good listening skills:

- ♥ **Talk to your baby from birth even if he cannot respond yet.** Talk about what you are doing and what you see – when you eat, shop, change his diaper, ride in a car and so on.
- ♥ **Use ‘parentese’ with your infant.** Using a singsong speech and exaggerated sounds and facial expressions, encourage infants to listen and focus on what is said. Respond to your baby’s coos, gurgles, and babblings. Copy the sounds he makes, and smile and talk back to him.
- ♥ **Read to your baby.** Set aside time to read to him daily. Select simple books with big colorful pictures, and point to the pictures and repeat what you see. When your child makes any sounds or gestures, respond right away with words and smiles.

## Activity for Infants: *Sounds and Rhythm*

### What You Need:

- Paper or an old magazine
- Blocks
- A wooden spoon
- A cardboard box, plastic container, pot, or pan

### What to Do:

1. Let your child experiment with making different sounds.
2. Show him how to rip a piece of paper or an old magazine.
3. Bang two blocks together to make sounds, then encourage him to do it himself.
4. Give him a wooden spoon to bang on a cardboard box, plastic container, pot, or pan. A sock over the spoon will soften the sound.
5. Talk about what your baby is doing and describe the sounds he is making. Use words like “loud,” “soft,” “same,” and “different.”
6. Count out loud while playing. For example, ask, “Can you hit the pot two times?” Show him what you mean. When he copies you, count “one, two.” Give him positive encouragement for his efforts: “Yes, you hit it two times,” or “What a loud sound you made!”

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Toddlers

During the toddler years, children experience growth in language skills. Although every child develops at their own pace, most toddlers are alert to the people around them and pick up on the language they hear. Your toddler will understand much more than he can say, and you may observe him trying to imitate many things he hears. He is also developing an awareness to the sounds in language, and the ability to detect and discriminate between different sounds (phonological awareness). This is crucial for learning to read.

Here are some ways you can help your toddler develop good listening and phonological awareness skills:

- ♥ Read and sing nursery rhymes. The rhyme and rhythm in a song like “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” will help your child hear the sounds and syllables in words.
- ♥ Tell your child stories about him. Toddlers love to hear stories about themselves (e.g., about the day he was born, on a visit to a special place such as grandparents’ home, etc.) Make the stories come to life and use different voices for different people.
- ♥ Syllables: Model and encourage your child to identify the number of syllables in a name by clapping or stamping his feet while saying the name. (e.g. ‘Ryan’- clap Ry-an).
- ♥ Model sounds: Let your child see your mouth and lips, teeth and tongue when you produce sounds (e.g. a snake makes a “sssss” sound). Enunciate and pronounce your speech clearly.



## Activity for Toddlers: *Find the Sound*

What You Need:

Ticking alarm clock or timer

What to Do:

1. Ask your child to cover his eyes.
2. Hide the clock or timer (under a cushion or blanket, behind the sofa, etc.).
3. Have your child uncover his eyes and find the ticking clock by listening, giving hints as needed such as “Do you think you should look under the cushions on the couch?”
4. As his listening skills develop, hide the clock in more difficult places.

**Variation:** If you don’t have an alarm clock or timer, try using a cell phone with its alarm activated.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*





# Preschoolers

Talking, reading books, and singing to children all contribute to enhancing their phonological awareness, one of the key components for reading success.

You may remember doing the *Hokey Pokey* when you were a young child. Did you know that by clapping out the syllables, “that’s what it’s all a-bout,” you were learning syllabication, an important phonological awareness skill? Breaking words down into syllables (syllabication), recognizing rhyming words, and identifying words with the same initial sounds (such as *boy* and *blue*) – are all fundamental phonological awareness skills, critical for learning to read.



Here are some ways you can help your preschooler develop good listening and phonological awareness skills:

- ♥ **Expose him to games that purposely emphasize attentive listening.** Games such as Stop/Go games, Musical Statues, or “I Spy” allow the child to listen for a prompt, such as “I spy with my little eyes something that begins with /b/.”
- ♥ **Sequence of directions:** Give your preschooler a sequence of directions to follow, such as “Wash your hands, dry them with a paper towel, put your paper towel in the trash can, then turn off the light”.
- ♥ **Story Retell:** After reading a story to your child, give him the opportunity to retell it to you in his own words.

## Activity for Preschoolers: “When we go to the store...”

What You Need: None

What to Do:

1. Say to your child, “When we go to the store, we’ll get bread” (or other item familiar to the child).
2. Invite your child to add to the list by saying, “When we go to the store, we’ll get bread and ....” (child decides milk).
3. Follow up with, “When we go to the store, we’ll get bread, milk and oatmeal.”
4. Continue playing the game and adding more words for as long as your child is still interested. You can even vary the activity by selecting things that only begin with a certain sound, such as /b/ (bread, bananas, bacon, etc.)

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles such as neck, arms and legs
- ♥ Learn through his senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his comprehension and recall
- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem solving skills

## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Bread in A Bag

Adapted from from: <http://busytoddler.com/2018/03/make-bread-bag-kids/>

#### Ingredients:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 gallon-sized resealable plastic bag       | 1 packet yeast (rapid rise or regular) |
| 1 mini loaf pan, sprayed with cooking spray | 1 cup warm water                       |
| 3 cups flour                                | ¼ cup butter, melted                   |
| ¾ cup sugar                                 | 1 tsp salt (to taste)                  |



#### Directions:

1. Combine 1 cup flour, sugar, and yeast packet together in a bowl.
2. Pour into a resealable bag and add 1 cup water. Seal the bag tightly, pressing out the air.
3. Have your child shake the bag, mixing and kneading the ingredients with his hands.
4. Set the bag aside for 10 minutes. Talk about how the yeast is activated.
5. After ten minutes, combine 1 cup of flour with salt and melted butter in a bowl. Pour this mixture into the bag.
6. Seal the bag again, pressing out the air. Have your child shake the bag again, mixing the ingredients together.
7. Open the bag and add in the last cup of flour. Seal the bag, and mix for the final time.
8. Pull out dough and place on a floured surface. With floured hands, knead dough together for 5–10 minutes.
9. Place dough in a greased loaf pan. Lay towel over the loaf pan and set it in a warm spot in your house. Allow the dough 30–45 minutes to rise.
10. Bake at 375°F for 25 minutes.

## Resources

### ***Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn***

In this book, author Mary Renck Jalongo provides helpful information about listening, and empowers those who care for young children to promote effective listening in young children and themselves.

### ***Fun Activities to Promote Listening Skills***

[https://www.babycenter.com/0\\_fun-activities-to-promote-listening-skills\\_64504.bc](https://www.babycenter.com/0_fun-activities-to-promote-listening-skills_64504.bc)

This article, from Baby Center, provides games and activities to boost your child's listening skills that meet your child's learning style.



## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### **Infants and Toddlers**

#### ***Hush Little Baby*** illustrated by Alik

This book is a folk lullaby that was first sung to sleepy children in England. It has since become well known in many parts of our country. There are many versions of this beloved lullaby.

#### ***Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?*** by Bill Martin, Jr.

A classic story that builds listening skills through its rhythmic words that encourage children to make the sounds animals make.

### **Preschoolers**

#### ***The Very Quiet Cricket*** by Eric Carle

An all time favorite about a cricket who tries to respond to each insect that greets him. The cricket rubs his wings together each time, but nothing happens, not a sound. Until one day he meets another cricket...and something different happens.

#### ***The Listening Walk*** by Paul Showers

This is a story about a young girl, her dog, and her dad going on a walk together. As they walk, she describes the various sounds they hear. A wonderful story that'll get children listening to the sounds they hear around them.



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