

Session 2.1

Attention and Listening *and* Understanding of Language

TOTAL TIME – 1.5 HOURS

Resources required:

- Wellcomm – 1 copy to refer to during session and show participants
- 'Listen Up' resource from The Communication Trust – free to download – print off examples of activities to show participants
- Some toys/objects for ICW activity

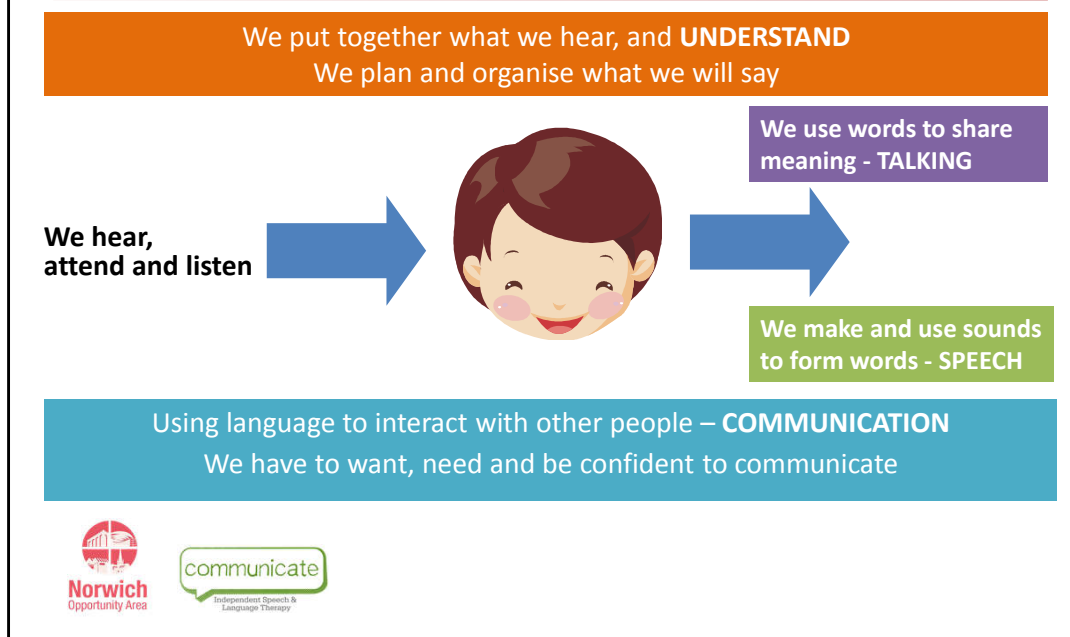
Session aims

- Understand what is meant by ‘attention and listening’ and why it’s an important element of children’s speech, language and communication development
- Be aware of typical development of attention and listening skills
- Learn some strategies and ideas to support children’s attention and listening skills
- Understand how ‘understanding of language’ fits in with children’s overall speech, language and communication development
- Be aware of typical development of comprehension skills
- Learn some strategies and ideas to support children’s understanding of language

1 min (0:01)

By the end of this session you will....

Review: What do speech, language and communication mean?



3 mins (0:04)

This slide (and notes below) are revision from the first session.

Speech, language and communication are complex skills which interact greatly with each other. This diagram aims to show what speech, language and communication are. This can be described as a process, from listening, through understanding, planning and talking

The orange and purple boxes describe language; understanding (sometimes called comprehension or receptive language) and talking (sometimes called expressive language). Language has structure and rules, which mean that people can convey their message and be understood by others. Language includes knowing and choosing the right words to explain what you mean, joining words together into sentences, stories and conversations, using word endings (e.g. '-ed' for the past) grammar and different types of sentences (e.g. questions). It is also making sense of what people say

The green box shows speech, which is how children use sounds to make words. So, articulating the sounds c-a-t and joining them together to make 'cat'. It also includes speaking with a clear voice, in a way that makes speech interesting and meaningful; speaking without hesitating too much or without repeating sounds or words

*Communication is shown in blue and is how we use language with **others**. This can include non-verbal communication, for example body language and facial expression, like eye-contact, turn-taking etc and how conversations work for example – how we use language or gestures in different ways like giving directions, asking for help.*

Review: What do speech, language and communication mean?



Adapted from a model used in many speech and language therapy services across the UK

2 mins (0:06)

Again, this is revision from the first session.

Speech, language and communication skills don't develop in a linear way. They all interact with each other. However, this can be a useful model in understanding there are skills children need to have in place and be secure before we can expect children to move on to developing other skills. It's important that children develop foundation skills that then mean that further skills can be built upon. E.g., we need children to understand words before they say them, developing a varied vocabulary is more important in the early years than pronunciation of sounds.... And imagine there's another block on the top – that would be literacy – all these things need to be in place before we can expect children to be secure in their literacy skills.

Attention and Listening



What does it mean?

- It's the ability to be able to focus and concentrate
- It's very important for speech, language and communication development
- It develops in stages, just like other communication skills



1 min (0:07)

Talk through the slide and discuss how obviously we would expect different levels of attention from a 6 month old baby to a 5 year old.

As children get older, TYPICALLY they become more able to filter out distractions and focus on the task in hand.

However some children may need support to develop and sustain these skills over a longer period of time.

Stages of Attention and Listening development



Level (Age)	What to expect
Level 1 (up to 12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily distracted - Attention will flit from one thing to another
Level 2 (12 months - 2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better concentration on a self chosen task - Single channelled attention
Level 3 (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still single channelled attention, but can shift attention from their task to the adult who is speaking with some help
Level 4 (3-4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to independently shift attention from an adult's instruction to their task
Level 5 (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dual channelled attention - Child able to follow instructions without having to shift their attention - May require adult support to re-focus on a task
Level 6 (5+ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention skills are well established



2 mins (0:09)

These stages are taken from the Reynell Stages of attention

Ask participants for their thoughts (briefly).

Does this match your observations of children you work with?

Attention and Listening - Activity

- In groups of 3:
 - **1 speaker** – explain your morning routine/route to work on a typical day
 - **1 listener** – listen to the speaker
 - **1 distracter** – explain to the listener how to make the perfect cup of tea...

5 mins (0:14)

The aim of this activity is to highlight to participants how it is difficult to ‘tune in’ to the ‘correct’ thing to be listening to – classrooms are noisy places, with a lot of distractions and often children will be unsure of what the correct thing is to listen to.

Adults need to use strategies to support children to tune out from distractions and focus on what you would like them to.

How do you support attention and listening?



**What are some of the ways that we already support children's attention and listening skills in our setting?
Think about:**

- Targeted groups?
- Everyday strategies?
- Listening activities?



5 mins (0:19)

Do this activity as a whole group, asking participants to share their practice around attention and listening. If they need help, provide examples of some strategies/listening activities/group work that they might do, e.g. listening walks, saying a child's name before speaking to them to get their attention, encouraging children to stop and look to help them shift their attention, visual timetables to support attention, doing actions with songs to help sustain attention, making their voice sound interesting etc.

There may well be things that participants are doing, but they don't realise that what they are doing supports attention and listening development!

Ways to support attention and listening



- Peekaboo games
- Ready, steady, go games (wait for go!)
- Action songs
- Turn taking games
- Hide the toy
- Simon Says
- Stop/go games
- Matching sounds and objects
- Listening to increasingly complex instructions/directions
- Listening out for key words/actions in a story
- Memory games



3 mins (0:22)

Here are some games to support attention and listening (taken from TCTs Universally Speaking and the Wellcomm Big Book of Ideas – Use Wellcomm to go in to more detail on some of the activities).

The list moves from games for young babies up to 5 year olds – however, it's important to think more around developmental stage rather than chronological age. So there may be some children who are older, but who still benefit from peekaboo and ready steady go style games, depending on where they're at with their communication and language development.

Listen Up!



Listen Up
Being able to communicate is not just about talking.
Along with getting your own message across, being able to listen, pay attention, interact, play and understand what's being said are the fundamental building blocks of communication. This pack explains more about these important skills and contains lots of activities to help you and your child. This can help them learn, make friends and have fun.

Listening
Where is that noise?
Get a toy or play music on a CD player or phone or mp3 player.
Hide the noisy object somewhere in the room - can your child find it?

Listening
Listening treasure box
Collect lots of things that make a noise, such as:
Crinkly paper
Noise making toys
Pots and pans
Musical instruments
Books with noise buttons
Explore! Listen and talk about them.

Listening
Spot the mistake
Sing a simple rhyme or song, but make a mistake - can children spot the mistake?
Incy wincy spider climbing up... a tree (should be spout)
The wheels on the... train go round and round (should be bus)
Twinkle twinkle little... hat (should be star)

Listening
Go games - wait for go
Build a tower of bricks. Your child waits for you to say "Go" before they can knock it down.
Have a race - ready steady go...
Push a car to each other - ready steady go...
Dance around - ready steady go...
Roll the ball - ready steady go...

Norwich Opportunity Area
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3 min (0:25)

Hand out examples printed from website.

These examples are from the 'Listen Up' resource from The Communication Trust, which is free to download.

These could be used as listening games that the whole class play, or during targeted small group activities for children who need more support in this area.

General strategies to support attention and listening



- Say the child's name to get their attention
- Use visual timetables/now & next boards to help children understand how long they are expected to focus for
- Use stopwatches/egg timers/countdown timers
- Use specific praise when you see good attention and listening skills ('good looking!', 'excellent listening!')
- Stop and listen to everyday noises and sounds throughout the day
- Listen to children when they speak to you – model good listening
- Be aware of distractions in your setting (e.g. music in the background, other activities going on...)
- Use visual reminders of what good listening is (e.g. Visual supports showing 'good looking', 'good sitting', 'good listening', etc)



5 mins (0:30)

Of course, as with all aspects of speech, language and communication development, attention and listening is something that can be supported all day everyday, and doesn't need a specific 'activity' to mean that you are working on it. These are some everyday strategies that can easily be implemented across the day.

Which of these are you using already? Are there any that you could introduce into your daily practice following today's session?

Review: What do speech, language and communication mean?



Adapted from a model used in many speech and language therapy services across the UK

1 min (0:31)

We've talked about attention and listening, now we're going to look at understanding of language...

Understanding/Comprehension/ Receptive language



What does it mean?

- This is about how we are able to understand what another person is saying to us
- Understanding/receptive language/comprehension are all terms that are used interchangeably
- This is a crucial aspect of children's language development
- In typical language development, children need to understand a word before they will be able to use it. **Understanding precedes use.**



1 min (0:32)

Activity

In small groups, listen to and have a look at the information on the following slide and the question which follows it. (Don't worry, it's meant to be complicated!) Then think about the five questions below:

- How easy is it to understand?
- What makes this the case?
- Could you answer the question?
- How 'good' was this question?
- How did you feel about the activity?

10 mins for this slide and next (0:42)

- 5 mins to look at in small groups
- 5 mins to discuss as a whole group

Then show the next slide with the information on it

Activity

Epistemology is generally characterised by a division of two competing schools of thought: rationalism and empiricism. The rationalists sought to reconstruct critically the total of human knowledge by the employment of such 'pure' reasoning from indubitable axioms. The empiricists took direct acquaintance with the 'impressions' of sense-experience as their bedrock of infallible knowledge

Question: Was rationalism one of the schools of thought?

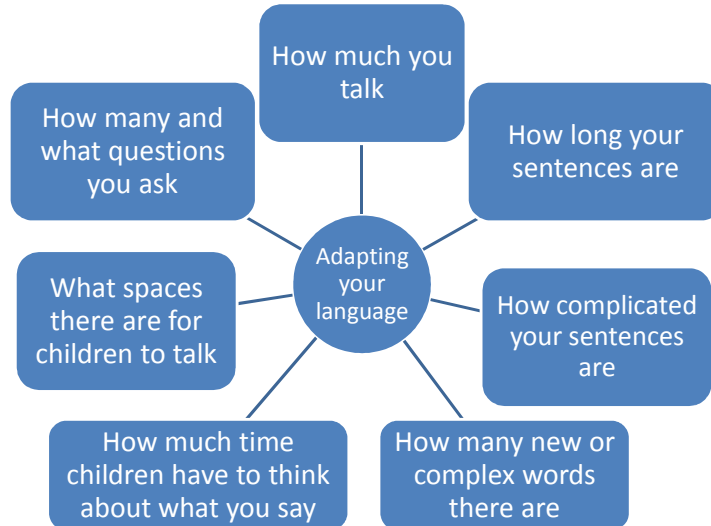
Read this out to participants, and discuss the questions from the previous slide (given again in notes below):

- *How easy is it to understand?*
- *What makes this the case?*
- *Could you answer the question?*
- *How 'good' was this question?*
- *How did you feel about the activity?*

Some things to try to draw out from participants' responses to this activity:

- The vocabulary is very difficult – in some places so difficult there is nothing even to 'hang' your understanding on, so you can't even keep track or make a good guess.
- The words are also very long and their meanings are very abstract. The sentence are long and complex.
- The definition of the word uses lots of words which are also difficult to understand.
- There are no pictures or other helpful clues.
- There's a lot to listen to in one go. There are no concrete examples and the context is weak.
- **However**, because the question only needs a yes/no answer, people should be able to answer it – either by working out from the information or even by guessing; they have a 50:50 chance of getting it right.

Adapting your language to support children's understanding



5 mins (0:47)

This was covered in the last session but we are looking at it again now to re-iterate and think how this links to children's understanding of language.

Talk through each of these points, relating to the discussion generated in the activity in the previous 2 slides.

Key Words

Also known as 'information carrying words' (ICWs)

This is about how many words a child is required to understand, not the number of words in a sentence

Examples:

Give mummy the car (0 ICW, 1 ICW, 2 ICW)

Give mummy the red car (0 ICW, 1 ICW, 2 ICW, 3 ICW)

Give mummy the big red car (0 ICW, 1 ICW, 2 ICW, 3 ICW, 4 ICW)

5 mins (0:52)

One way of thinking about the demands a task places on a child's understanding of language, is to think about the information carrying words (ICWs). This model is based on The Derbyshire Language Scheme.

ICWs are all based on the choices a child has.

In Example one, depending on what/who the child has in front of them, they may need to understand anything from 0 ICW (Where just the context is enough, to 2 ICW (if there is another person present, and if there are other things apart from cars)

In Example 2, this would be a more simple instruction if there was only one person and one red car, but made more complex if there were more than one person, different colours of cars, and different vehicles

In example 3, this would be simple if only one person and one object, but more complex if more than one person, big/small cars, different colours of cars, different vehicles – this could be a 4 ICW instruction dependent on what there is in front of the child to choose from.

Key words activity

In pairs, think of some of the toys/games/activities you have in your setting

Write down some 1, 2, 3 and 4 key word instructions

Also write down which people and objects would need to be available to the child in order for the child to demonstrate they understand (i.e. where there is a choice for the child to make)



10 mins (1:02)

You can use real toys/objects for this activity if you like to help make it more meaningful.

Blank Level Questions

Blank's Levels of questioning

- 4 levels of questions ranging from basic to more complex
- **Level 1** = Concrete questions – the answer is in front of you! *Who's that?, What's this?, What's he doing?, Can you find one that's the same as this?*
- **Level 2** = The answer is there, but you need to look more closely.... *What's happening? Who's behind the door? What colour is the bag? Can you show me something you eat? Show me what we use for cutting/eating/drawing*
- **Level 3** = The answer isn't necessarily there, you need to think a bit more... *Show me something you sit on, what do you think might happen next? Find something we can't take to school, how are these the same/different? How are these the same?*
- **Level 4** = More abstract, the child needs to use verbal reasoning skills... *why is she doing that? How could he make the girl feel better? What might happen next? Why did you choose that? Why did you do that?*

10 mins (1:12)

- 5 mins to discuss points on slide
- 5 mins to look at books and practice generating questions at each of the levels in pairs

When thinking about children's understanding of language we also need to think about how we use questions. It is important for us to ask questions that children understand.

The information above is from a model of questioning called the Blank's model of questioning (developed by Marion Blank in the 70's). According to Blank:

60% of 3 year olds understand level 1 and level 2 questions

65% of 5 year olds understand level 3 and level 4 questions

We don't need to know or remember this in great detail necessarily, but it is helpful to think about and be aware of the different levels of complexity of questions, and why it's not for example very helpful to ask a 2 year old why they have done something, because this is beyond their verbal reasoning capability at that age!

Think about this in the context of responding to and managing children's behaviour. What questions do we tend to ask children when they have done something wrong? Are these questions always at a level that they can understand and respond to?

Hand out a selection of children's books for participants to look at in pairs. Think about examples of questions at each of the levels that could be asked while looking through the book. (5 mins for this)

Development of Understanding



Age	What to expect
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand words like 'bye-bye' and 'up' – especially if supported with a gesture - Recognise the names of familiar, everyday objects such as 'cup', 'teddy', 'daddy'
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand everyday words and some simple, frequently used phrases e.g. 'shoes on' 'in your buggy' - Be able to point to familiar objects when asked
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand between 200 and 500 words - Understand simple questions/instructions such as 'where's baby?' 'mummy's turn'
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand simple 'who' 'what' and 'where' questions - Understand longer instructions e.g. 'put your coat on and get your bag'
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be able to answer questions as to why something has happened - Answer questions about a story they have just heard - Understand colour, number and time related words
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand more complicated language such as 'first' 'last' 'might' 'above' 'in between' - Understand words that describe sequences e.g. 'first we'll buy a picnic, then we'll go to the park'



5 mins (1:17)

These stages are taken from TCTs Universally Speaking.

Ask for any thoughts from participants on this: *is this what you would expect?*

It can be quite difficult to really assess where a child is at with their understanding because often they will use routine/context to support understanding, or copying what other children do, so it can be difficult to spot.

How do you support children's understanding of language?



What are some of the ways that we already support children's understanding in our setting?

Think about:

- Targeted groups?
- Everyday strategies?
- Specific activities?



5 mins (1:22)

Do this activity as a whole group, asking participants to share their practice around how they support children's understanding of language

Strategies to support the development of understanding



- Help children to look at you when you're speaking – be clear that this is what you want them to do (*NB: beware of asking children with ASD to do this, or children for whom eye contact is difficult*)
- Use children's names before you give an instruction
- Simplify the language you use – be aware of the complexity/length of your sentences and instructions
- 'Chunk' your language – give instructions one at a time
- Use positive language – say what you want the child to do rather than what you don't want
- Be careful with sarcasm, idioms, abstract language
- Use visual supports to aid understanding of vocabulary, routines and instructions



5 mins (1:27)

These are based on some of the strategies from the WellComm Big Book of Ideas – more information is in the book (show participants).

Talk through the points on the slide.

First point – Beware of asking children with ASD to do this, or children for whom eye contact is difficult. Insisting on these children looking at you can sometimes create anxiety and comprehension problems. If you know that a child has difficulty making direct eye contact, ask them to look in your general direction or at a listening tool such as a “magnetic stick” or other focal point that you are holding.

Which of these strategies are you using already? Are there any that you could introduce into your daily practice following today's session?

Reflections and actions

- How do you support “attention and listening” and “understanding of language” already?
- Is there anything you could do more of?
- What might you do differently as a result of what we have covered today?

3 mins (1:30) – or any additional remaining time