

# Talking Tips

Families **talk** now

## What is attention?

Attention is listening and being able to focus on specific tasks or sounds. Children sometimes need to transfer their focus from one activity to another, and being able to maintain focus for a specific length of time. Quite a skill for young children to learn!

## Why is attention important?

Some children are slower to develop their talking skills, and this can be linked to their attention span and listening.

Some children find it hard to focus on anything for very long – they just switch from doing one thing to doing the next thing. Their attention span is short.

This may mean that they don't have enough attention to think about all the words that they hear adults saying.

Good attention for T.V. programmes or computer games isn't the same. When we watch T.V., things just happen on the screen – we don't have to think. This means that a different kind of attention is needed for the T.V.

Your child needs to develop good attention for thinking about things in the 'real world'

Children's attention develops in stages. If your child finds it hard to pay attention, it might not be their fault. Their attention skills might not be developed enough. We can help them to develop their attention.

## How to help attention develop

1. Have time each day when you play with your child. Sit on the floor and join in with their games. This helps young children to let adults "into their world" so the child is ready to listen.
2. Turn the T.V. and radio off for part of the day. Adults are good at ignoring noises in the background. Some children find this very hard, even if it looks like they can ignore the T.V. If you turn it off, they can practice just listening to you and interacting with you.
3. Encourage your child to pay attention to a toy, game or activity for just a little bit longer each time. Just a few seconds is good – at first don't expect minutes. You can do this by getting them to help tidy the toy up, or by joining with their game – Saying or doing something funny will catch their attention.
4. Doing things together helps a child look and listen for a bit longer. For example, a young child might struggle to do up their shoe. They might get cross, give up quickly, and start to do something else. They have lost their attention for that activity. If you do the job together, and talk about what you are doing, it can help to stretch out their attention for a little bit longer.
5. Talk about the thing that your child is doing and thinking about. This way, your child hears words that are linked to their thoughts. Remember your child may not be able to switch their attention from their own thoughts to your words.

