

The Difference Between Hearing and Listening

EVERY GENERATION SUFFERS the transgressions of its era. The generation of the 21st century will remember, with regret, that its children weren't prepared to be better listeners—a dilemma that is commonplace in clinics across the country. Parents bring in their children for hearing concerns, but the root of the problem often is they are just poor listeners. We have a generation of kids whose babysitters have been cable television and Nintendo games.

Studies show that children suffer from a lowered attention span due to television, video games and computers. Peter Jensen at the National Institute of Mental Health concluded, "Extensive exposure to television and video games may promote development of brain systems that scan and shift attention at the expense of those that focus attention."

It's difficult to listen when you can't focus. Listening and communicating are not necessary if you're spending time in front of a screen. When is the last time you heard a child have a conversation with a television?

This shouldn't be shocking news. Equally disturbing is a recent survey by The State of Play: Back to Basics, which found that one in five parents have "forgotten" how to play with their children. Lack of time and shortage of inspiration were cited as the main reasons and, sadly, one in three parents said they found playtime boring.

More telling: Half of the children surveyed said they'd like to spend more time "playing" traditional games with their parents.

So, how do we learn to play and promote important listening skills? Tanya Byron, clinical psychologist, says there are four key ingredients to successful playtime between parents and children: education, inspiration, integration and communication.

The other good news is that by playing interactive games with a young child and

modeling (not teaching) language, playtime is also great facilitator of speech. The hardest part of learning to play as an adult is to follow the child's lead. Once the adult begins to control the play, the game is over. The key is to let the child lead the play and the adult follow.

Games don't have to be elaborate to be entertaining. Dressing up, drawing and pretending can be enjoyed by all children. Books provide lots of opportunities to promote language and, with a little punch in the adult's presentation, can be loads of fun.

When playing with children, adults should always model good listening skills. You can't expect children to be good listeners if no one listens to them. Be interested and attentive while playing with a child. Turn phones and other communication devices off for uninterrupted time, which teaches children the importance of face-to-face relationships.

There is much to be learned through television, video games and computers; however, moderation is the key to everything. No electronic device is a substitute for a parent, and time spent in front of a screen should be limited to make time for face-to-face interaction.

Creating good listeners is an important part of our job as a parent. Helping those with limited parenting experience understand the important difference between hearing and listening is part of our job as an audiologist. Provide helpful suggestions to get families playing together.

Some of my favorite activities are:

- Hedbanz Game for Kids: Three to seven players aged 6+ take turns trying



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to figure out what the card on their forehead is. Lots of laughter makes this simple, language-facilitating game great for the whole family.

- Blocks: Building blocks are always fun and educational. Toys don't have to be fancy to be fun. Use any kind of blocks. My son's favorite is LEGOs, and the possibilities are endless.

- Books: Books that have few words are especially good to facilitate language and listening skills. Letting a child tell you what's happening, or what's going to happen, gets them engaged with the story.

- Quiet time: Close your eyes with your child and listen to what's going on. The person who can list the most sounds wins.

- Music: Singing, listening or playing a musical instrument gets both sides of the brain busy—especially useful if a child has a unilateral hearing loss.

- Farm sets: There are so many ways to play with a farm set. Kids love to make the animal sounds and can play for hours.

- Plastic army men: Create your own battle! Lots of interesting plastic men, planes and tanks make for lots of great wars and discussions. [Lupm](#)



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