

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Listen to Learn

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Teaching children to listen is often a difficult task. How does one describe an action that seems to occur automatically? It is important to bring awareness to children that listening can be a deliberate action over which they have control.

**The first step in defining listening is to teach the anatomy of listening...and not just the ear!** Listening occurs when the entire body is involved. Some children will be able to “sit still,” have “quiet hands,” and make eye contact with the speaker; however, these skills are very difficult for neurodivergent learners and may prevent optimal listening in kids with ADHD, autism, etc. The needs of each child should be taken into consideration. Teachers and parents can teach students strategies and modify the environment to help them listen. Some examples include:

- Provide fidgets or other sensory objects for children to hold
- Reduce auditory distractions (use noise blocking headphones, etc.)
- Allow children to pace or stand
- Place bands around legs of the chair for students to use a fidget for their feet

**The next step in teaching listening skills is to help the children identify “distracters” that make listening difficult.** Talk about what helps the brain to be calm and ready to listen and learn: a quiet room, limited visual distractions, the ability to move around or sit comfortably, etc. Then talk

about what makes it difficult to listen and pay attention: distracting sounds or background noise, being hungry or tired, being in a visually distracting environment, having to sit still when your body needs to move, etc.



**You can also use this opportunity to teach children about how certain sounds make us feel when we are trying to learn.** Do certain sounds make you feel calm/focused, excited/energetic, or stressed/distracted? If children have a hard time identifying their own internal feelings (a skill called *interoception*), talk about how to recognize signs of stress in the body: increased heart rate, breathing more quickly or shallowly, feeling uncontrollably fidgety or antsy, etc. Do birds chirping outside make you feel calm or stressed/distracted? How about the sound of trickling water? What about classical instrumental music? Talk about ways to modify the environment to create

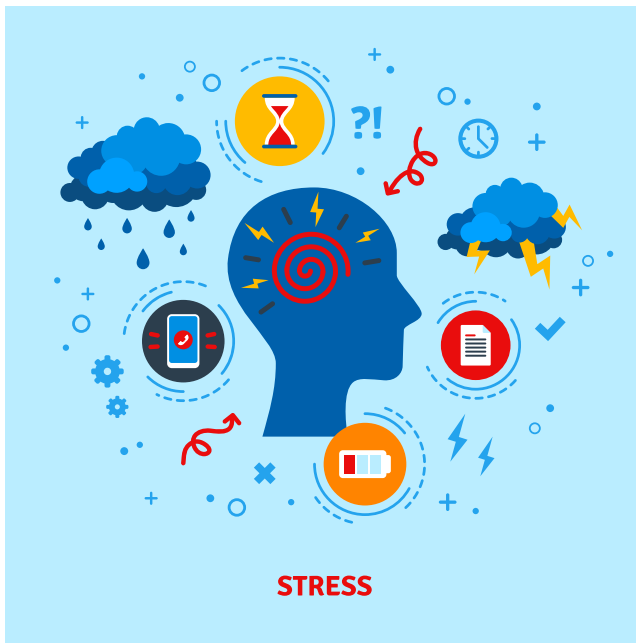


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an optimal “listening and learning zone.”  
Work with the child’s teachers or caregivers to help limit distractions to improve listening and auditory processing abilities.

Listening skills must be reviewed often in order to reinforce the skill. Awareness of the listening process should begin as early as preschool and should continue through most of a person’s education, even through adulthood.



References:

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