

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Hear This!

 Talking and Listening

Toddlers are beginning to experiment with all the different uses of language, and one of the most important skills for them to learn is listening. In order to become fluent speakers, toddlers need to learn to tell the difference between sounds and to understand what others are saying to them.

What is the practice?

You can give toddlers the opportunity to listen to language in many different contexts, and to act on what they hear, all throughout the day. Helping them listen for sounds—including rhymes—in everyday speech and in songs, nursery rhymes, stories, and poems, is an important part of toddlers' developing language.

What does the practice look like?

Playing *Simon Says* and other listening games, providing toddlers with music and stories on tape or CD, and reinforcing their understanding with immediate feedback are all everyday examples of ways to increase toddlers' listening skills.

How do you do the practice?

As with all skills, toddlers learn listening best when they are actively engaged in a fun, developmentally appropriate activity geared to their interests.

- *Simon Says* is a game that has infinite variations for toddlers learning body parts, directional words (*up, down, over, under, etc.*), and descriptive words (*fast, slow, etc.*). Give your children the chance to take turns taking the role of Simon to encourage them to listen to each other, not just to you.
- Play games that encourage toddlers to listen to variations in speech, such as whispering and shouting, talking quickly and slowly, and making their voices high and low. Help them practice identifying the differences when they hear them.
- Recite short poems or nursery rhymes with your children while encouraging them to act them out. They have to figure out what actions to do by listening to the words. Songs or fingerplays with movement are also good for encouraging listening and keeping toddlers interested.
- Help toddlers listen for individual sounds by drawing out words very slowly and then asking them to speed them up, or say them just as slowly. Emphasize rhyming words in songs or poems and point out the sounds that are the same.



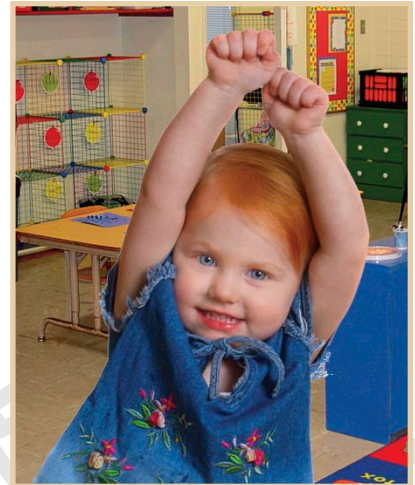
How do you know the practice worked?

- Do the children in your care enjoy playing listening games like *Simon Says*?
- Do they begin to identify the difference between 'loud' and 'soft' noises, and other opposites?
- Do they participate in acting out movements corresponding to the words in stories, poems or songs?

Take a look at more verbal play with toddlers

Listening and Transitions

To help with transitions in Ms. Eleanor's toddler class, she and Mike, the center's early interventionist, develop some listening games to help focus the children. When it is time to move from one activity or location to another, one of the professionals says to the class as a whole, "If you can hear the sound of my voice, clap your hands," and claps once to demonstrate. Soon all the children begin clapping, and the next instruction comes: "If you can hear my voice, put your hands over your head." The game continues with different movements until everyone is focused and participating. Every so often Mike and Ms. Eleanor change the game by whispering instead of talking, or using only hand movements, or only silly movements. The children know this game means they are about to do something new, and the adults frequently see the toddlers imitating the game with each other.



Rhyme Time

Eloi, 30 months old, is working on a set of dress-up bear puzzles with his home visitor, Dave. The three bears and other storybook characters are some of Eloi's favorite things right now. As he works on finding the right pieces, he sing-songs quietly, "Bear, bear, bear. Bear, hair. Dave, listen—bear, hair, care!" "You're rhyming, aren't you?" Dave asks. "How about bear and pear? Do they sound the same?" "Bear, pear, bear, tear" Eloi says. "All the same." "What about bear and dog?" Dave asks. Eloi laughs. "Not same," he says. They try out different rhyming and non-rhyming words as they work the puzzles.

Signs Aid 'Listening'

Maggie is a 32-month-old with hearing impairment in an inclusive toddler class. Her early interventionist, Ms. Shannon, comes to Maggie's class to work with her, and is helping Maggie's teacher, Mr. David, with his sign language. Maggie loves playing games at circle time. When Mr. David plays a song about different animals, the children all imitate his signs along with the movements in the song. "Fly like a bird, everyone," Mr. David signs and says, and the children pretend to fly in their circle. Ms. Shannon has helped Maggie understand about music by letting her touch speakers to feel the vibrations, tapping out rhythms on Maggie's arm, and playing together with different instruments. The signing in this game allows Maggie to "listen" to the song's instructions and act out all the animal parts along with the other children.

