



Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) Strategies and Techniques

The goal of LSL is for your child to develop listening and spoken language skills just like their hearing friends. To achieve this goal, there are specialized LSL strategies and techniques that you can learn, which place an emphasis on learning spoken language through listening. These strategies and techniques take full advantage of an open doorway to the brain, which is prewired to learn spoken language.

DIRECT THE CHILD TO LISTEN



Whenever you hear a sound or a person talking, or before you start talking to your child, make sure you have their auditory attention. You can do this by pointing to your ear to alert the child that there is important auditory information to listen to. Another way, is to say “Listen!” These strategies provide the child with an opportunity to detect and pay attention to the sounds and speech around them.

POINT OUT SOUND AND NAME IT



Say, “I hear a [name of sound].” Then imitate the sound, and name it again.

Example: “Listen! I hear an airplane.” (Pause and point towards the airplane.) “Ahhhhhh!” (Imitate the sound.) “The airplane is flying.” (Add a comment: use the word in a simple sentence.) “It’s an airplane!” (Use the word again at the end of a short sentence.)

When you direct your child to listen, point out the sound, name it, and talk about it, they learn that sound and speech are important. It helps your child begin to understand the meaning of sound and spoken language.

USE AUDITION FIRST



Let your child hear a sound before you show it to them. This provides ear contact before eye contact, which is critical to grow your baby’s brain for auditory skills. So talk about an object before you show it to them, start a song or fingerplay before beginning the motions, or talk about the page in a book before you turn the page. This will provide lots of opportunities for your baby to learn to listen throughout the day.

DESCRIBE ACTIONS AND THOUGHTS



Much like a sports announcer, describing the play-by-play action of what your baby experiences every day will help them grow their listening and language skills. This self-talk provides your baby with the opportunity to hear lots of words so they can reach hearing 40 million words by age 4. As your child gets older, continuing to talk out loud about your thoughts helps them learn that others may have thoughts and feelings different from their own.

KEEP THE SERVE AND RETURN GOING



Practice by expecting a response from your baby. Use pausing, waiting, and leaning in with an expectant look to encourage a response from your baby. This teaches them the power of turn-taking in conversations. For older children, use another person to model the answer to a question or provide the opportunity for the child to fill in a missing word. When a child engages in serve and return, the connections in the brain grow and become stronger, which is critical for listening, spoken language, and reading.

MAKE IT EASIER TO LISTEN



Control the listening environment and place emphasis on sounds and words. As a new listener, your baby needs a quieter environment with background noises at a minimum. Because your baby hasn’t fully developed their spoken language skills yet, they aren’t able to fill in any missing sounds or words. You can emphasize sounds and make words easier to hear by whispering, becoming a “drama momma” or “dramatic daddy” by using a voice rich in tone and melody, or by using acoustic highlighting, which means making a sound longer than normal in a word or saying a word in a singsong way. After emphasizing a sound or word in any of these ways and following the child’s response, reinforce the learning by saying it again as you normally would.

EXPECT AN ANSWER



Help your child learn to answer questions by changing your questions from open-set questions, such as “How many crackers do you want?”, to a closed-set question that has a limited choice of answers, like “How many crackers do you want: one or two?” Providing choices helps a child with limited vocabulary and spoken language skills. These techniques help your child gain confidence in their skills. The goal is to continually raise the bar as they learn and grow their listening and talking skills.

CREATE AN AUDITORY SANDWICH

Create an auditory sandwich when you speak to your child and you don’t think they understand. You can do other things to help reinforce the spoken word such as pointing, gesturing, or another visual cue to help them then put it back into listening by saying it again without the visual help. This will help your child improve their ability to understand spoken language through listening.



An auditory sandwich is made in three simple steps:

- Step 1 - Listen: Use the strategy of Audition First to talk to your child about an object or action. If they need more information to understand, then move to the next step.
- Step 2 - Add More: Provide another strategy to give your baby more information. This could be pointing toward the object to help them understand the phrase; or the acoustic highlighting strategy to emphasize a specific sound or word.
- Step 3 - Listen: Without any pointing or gesturing, put what you said back into listening by saying the same phrase or word as you would normally say it.

EXPAND AND EXTEND YOUR CHILD’S UTTERANCES



Add your words to their comments to expand and model more complex language or extend the comment by talking about past or future experiences. For example, if your baby says, “Ball,” you could expand their utterance by saying, “Yes, you have a big ball. Roll the ball.” As your child learns more words, keep raising the bar by using new words that mean the same thing. This will help to continue growing their vocabulary instead of getting stuck in a rut and only using words that you know the child can understand, which stifles vocabulary growth. For example, once your baby is saying, “Bye-bye,” begin to extend their vocabulary and understanding by adding new words and phrases that mean the same thing, such as “See you later,” or “So long!”

ASK “WHAT DID YOU HEAR?”



Encourage your child to listen the first time something is said or asked of them. Children with hearing loss can often develop a habit of asking “Huh?” or “What?” Asking “What did you hear?” can break this habit, teach them to listen the first time, and build their confidence in their listening skills. For example, if you ask “Where do you want to go for lunch?” and your child replies “Huh?”, follow up by asking “What did you hear?” If your child responds “Lunch?”, say “Good for you. Where do you want to go for lunch?” Using “What did you hear?” is also a diagnostic tool to learn if your child is consistently missing part of a message. This will inform you and your LSL interventionist about your child’s auditory skill development.

For more resources on using LSL Strategies & Techniques including downloadable handouts visit <http://hearingfirst.org/learning-growing-lsl/lsl-strategies-techniques>.