

## Learning to Listen: Listening to Learn.

### **Making meaning amidst all the noise!**

Centres, preschools, schools and families can be noisy places. So frequent early listening activities give children the best start with language and communication skills, as well as supporting cognitive learning. It will also help pick up hearing issues, common to many children.

Effective listening is the first skill needed to develop both music and language skills. Listening for babies and young children is such an important skill. It is the basis for language learning, for play, for relationship building and for music making. Hearing is an early sense to develop, It is a strong sense in our survival needs. Babies hear their mother's heartbeat in utero and straight after birth, will recognise familiar voices and music heard regularly in the womb. Babies are born ready to listen to the musical elements in our voices so will tune in to soothing lullabies or the playfulness in rhymes and simple songs. This makes music a great learning/listening tool. Babies and children will make meaning from listening and imitating in a one on one relationship. A carer or parent needs to take the time to name objects and people and reinforce the young child's first attempts at sounds and words. It is important to know that a child who is listened to, will be learning to listen, as well as speak!

### **Singing is a special kind of speech**

Regular singing and rhyming experiences, that encourage the baby and young child to participate, prepare the child's ear and brain for the language learning of that culture. Recorded music does not have the same effect, as it is the reciprocal communication in singing and saying rhymes with a child, that supports learning. Listening and responding to music also involves both sides of the brain.

### **Balance and the Ear – Vestibular learning**

The ear is responsible for registering vibrations that the brain interprets into meaningful sound, but our balance/ vestibular system is also located in the inner ear. Every movement of the head registers in the brain, by fluid moving in the inner ear canals. So there is a connecting of the auditory nerve and the balance system.

No wonder children have enhanced language skills when there are frequent opportunities to move to music.

### **Listening activities and hearing problems**

Children need to hear well functionally, before they can perceive sound effectively.

A child with recurrent ear, nose and throat infections may have temporary or permanent hearing loss. During

listening and music activities, signs that could indicate hearing problems are: disinterest, inattention, being

easily frustrated and disruptive, ignoring instructions, balance problems and unexplained tantrums.

### **Listening aids all EYLF outcomes**

If we think about listening in the context of the EYLF outcomes we might first think of outcome 5. Listening

will, most definitely support children becoming effective communicators. But children with strong listening

skills will be more connected and able to contribute to their world and will be more confident, involved learners (outcome 2 and 4). But surely listening is a big part of identity and wellbeing (outcomes 1 and 3). So listening truly underpins all learning outcomes. To conclude, with such a bombardment of sound in most environments, there can be so few opportunities for children to experience silence. It's no wonder children may be "tuning out" from excessive sound stimulation.

We can help them "tune in", and really listen, if our teaching supports auditory discrimination skills.

**A listening, learning ladder** – activities to support the growing child's listening and cognitive skills in the first 5 years. Each listening milestone supports the next.

- talking to babies in an engaging, musical way.
- using songs, fun sounds and movement, to play with or comfort a baby.
- responding to babies sounds, then matching sounds with objects or actions so word recognition begins.
- having fun with songs and rhymes, with simple sounds or responses e.g. animal sounds.
- playing with a sound line (hanging objects that make varied sounds).
- listening to stories with different sounds to copy, different voices for characters or feelings expressed.
- hearing varied styles of music, to express different emotions, preferably with movement.
- being asked to try known songs in different ways e.g. soft loud, fast/slow.
- asking preschoolers to sit and really listen e.g. to wind, rain, sounds in distance and talk about what they heard.
- find objects in the natural environment and experiment with making varied sounds.
- have the children echo patterns of claps or drum beats on a percussion instrument or on the body.
- listening to and playing unusual instruments and comparing sounds.
- lots of conversations with interested parents, grandparents, carers and teachers.