

Fun Ways to Show “I’m Listening” Without Eye Contact

Playful scenarios for practicing comfortable communication choices

These activities are designed to help children practice showing attention and connection in ways that feel comfortable. Eye contact is not required. A child might listen best while looking at an object, facing partly sideways, using a gesture, saying a short phrase, or sharing attention around an activity.

Communication Choices to Practice

- Look at the person’s shoulder, hat, hands, or the object being discussed.
- Turn your body toward the person, even if your eyes look somewhere else.
- Nod, wave, give a thumbs-up, or point to show understanding.
- Say a listening phrase, such as “I hear you,” “Okay,” “Tell me more,” or “I need a minute.”
- Use a card, drawing, AAC device, or written note to respond.

Fun Practice Scenarios

1. The Dragon Egg Delivery

Setup: One child is a dragon keeper delivering a pretend dragon egg. Another person gives directions: “Carry it slowly,” “Put it in the nest,” or “Watch out for lava!”

Practice: Show listening by looking at the egg, turning your body toward the speaker, nodding, or saying “Got it!” **Afterward:** Ask, “Which listening choice felt easiest?”

2. Space Mission Control

Setup: The child is an astronaut, and the adult is Mission Control. Mission Control gives short instructions: “Press the blue button,” “Check the moon map,” or “Report what you see.”

Practice: The astronaut can look at the control panel, point to the map, repeat one keyword, or say “Ready for the next step.” **Bonus:** Let the child invent a “mission signal” such as a salute, beep sound, or finger tap.

3. Silly Snack Café

Setup: The child is a café worker taking pretend orders for silly snacks like rainbow toast, dinosaur soup, or moon cookies.

Practice: Show attention by looking at the menu, holding up fingers for the number of items, repeating the order, or using a notepad. **Question:** “How did the customer know you were listening?”

4. Mystery Detective Clues

Setup: Hide three simple clues around the room. The detective receives clue hints from a helper: “Look near something soft,” or “The next clue is beside something blue.”

Practice: The detective can look at the clue card, say “I’m thinking,” hold up a hand for “pause,” or turn toward the helper while processing. **Celebrate:** “You showed listening in your detective way!”

5. Animal Band Rehearsal

Setup: Everyone chooses an animal sound or instrument. The band leader gives cues like “Lions play softly,” “Frogs stop,” or “Penguins start.”

Practice: Children can watch the leader’s hands, listen for the cue word, copy a rhythm, or use a stop/start card. **Reflection:** “What helped your brain follow the band?”

Tips for Adults

- Offer choices instead of requiring one “right” way to listen.
- Model phrases like “I’m listening while I look at my toy.”
- Praise the communication signal, not eye contact: “Your nod told me you heard the direction.”
- Keep practice short, playful, and sensory-friendly.
- Let the child opt out, pause, or choose a different signal at any time.