

Developing Listening Skills

Auditory processing is how we take in information presented to us via sound. After hearing a sound, the next step is within our brains - to process what was heard putting meaning to the sounds. Direction following is a skill of auditory processing. You hear a direction then you must process or think about what was said and then carry out the direction. Many people have difficulty with auditory processing skills. Perhaps all of us at some time have difficulty or weakness in this area. Take for instance when someone is talking to you in a noisy room or in a restaurant. You may not fully understand the message that is sent to you.

Here are some ideas to strengthen auditory processing and/or direction following weaknesses for children:

- Give directions in smaller chunks. I.e. First say, "____go to the refrigerator, take out your juice and bring it to Mom." Then repeat it in smaller chunks – _____, go to the refrigerator. (she goes) Take out juice. (she removes juice) _____ bring the juice to Mom. (she brings the juice to Mom.) You've essentially changed a 3-step direction into 3 1-step directions that should be easier to follow. If successful, try to make the directions into 2-step directions.
- Shorten directions for younger children.
- Have child repeat a question before answering or repeat a direction before executing.
- Always be sure to have a listener's complete attention before giving directions or asking questions. She likely needs to concentrate. If there is any noise or no eye contact or attention is elsewhere - the question will be lost. Ask her to look at you.
- Most young children will just answer a question – they will not repeat the question within their answer, so please don't expect that. I.e. What is your favorite toy? Child will likely answer – *my teddy bear*. She will not say: *My favorite toy is my teddy bear*. This is a higher level skill that usually doesn't happen until well into elementary school.
- Be sure that your expectations are age appropriate for her. *Who, what, which*, and *where* questions are easier to answer than *why, how, when*, and questions such as *what do you think will happen. . .?* She needs to understand basic concrete questions before advancing to more complicated abstract questions.
- The manner in which questions are asked is important. Is it straightforward? How do you make pudding? Or are extra invasive words causing difficulty, thus losing the goal for her. For example, "Tell me how to make pudding." The seemingly simple addition of "tell me" may cause a child extra processing time, which may be complicated.
- Always give enough time to process the information presented and then answer the question or follow the direction. Sometimes it is a good tactic to silently count to self after asking the question or giving the direction. Count slowly to 5 or even 10!
- Try not to bombard with question after question after question with no time to respond in between.
- Gestures or visual aides such as pictures may strengthen a concept or request.