



Are you a Parent or Teacher of a Child who Struggles to Listen or Say What they Know?

To Support Listening (“taking in” or understanding what others say):

1. Chunk/Repeat Instructions.

- Break tasks into **one-step directions**. Repeat *as needed*.

2. CHECK IN after giving whole group instructions.

- Rather than ask a yes/no question (e.g., ‘Do you understand what to do?’), **be specific** (e.g., “What are you going to do first?” “And then?”) Note that since this is also a “speaking” task, so it may be easier for them to point to a visual.
- Give them time to process each step before moving on (e.g., instead of “Open your book and turn to page 47, then answer questions 1 to 3,” say, “First, open your book. [Wait.] Now turn to page 47. [Wait.] Now read question 1.”
- **Remind them of the visuals that will help them** (e.g., charts, images, cue cards) (and/or make a cue card for them).

2. Use MORE Visuals MORE OFTEN.

- **Use your body language/facial expressions** as helpful visuals.
- Re-draw **quick sketches while talking to them** (e.g., for a novel, make stick figures for characters).
- Draw their attention to the visual schedule often, and **re-create** their own mini schedule **while they look on**.

3. Create a “Task List” to Check Off.

- Highlight or check off as tasks are completed.
- This is **EXTREMELY** helpful to help them stay on track.

4. PAUSE! Take a deep breath.

- Let them know it's okay to take their time by **PAUSING** to think – normalize **PAUSING** in the classroom.
- Give them a non-verbal cue (e.g., touching your chin) to make “I’m thinking” an daily classroom routine.
- **Normalize processing pauses in the classroom** (e.g., “We all need a moment to think”) and take **deep breaths**.



5. WAIT! Stop and Pay Attention.

- Resist talking/giving instructions when they doing a task or **clearly not “taking in” what you are saying**.
- Resist talking/giving instructions **when they are in the middle of the first instruction you gave them**.
- Say: “I’m going to tell you something important!” **PAUSE**, and “Let me know when you are ready!” 😊

6. Pre-Teach/Preview and REVIEW

- Tell them **what you will be doing before** the activity. Review during. Review after.
- Introduce new vocabulary or concepts **before** the lesson.
- Let them hear, see, and rehearse the ideas *without the pressure of answering questions right away*.
- Take 5 minutes at the end of each lesson to review and **ASK THEM TO REPEAT WHAT THEY KNOW/WHAT THEY JUST LEARNED** (this is extremely effective to solidify learning, but note that this is more of a “speaking/expression” task).

7. Use Specific Words rather than “this, that, thing, it”

- Rather than, “Put this into that thing over there”, say “Put your painting on the art shelf at the back of the room.”

8. Offer Quiet Processing Spaces—places to go if/when overwhelmed by language load.

To Support Speaking (saying what they know, or what they want):

1. Give Multiple Choice Questions

- Reduce the burden of generating language from scratch (e.g., instead of asking, “Why did the character leave?” say: “Did the character leave because he was scared, or because he was angry?”; “Do we need scissors? Or glue?”).

2. Encourage them to Advocate for themselves with you (and others)

- Teach them that they can come to you after whole group meetings and ask you to repeat the instructions; break directions into smaller steps; make a task chart (just write steps quickly on a cue card); create a visual, etc.

3. Think, Pair, Share with Peers

- Allow them to rehearse their answers with a peer (e.g., “**Think for a minute, Pair up with a peer, Share**”) before sharing with the class. Sometimes they just need a bit of time to “prep” their thoughts.
- Use peer buddies for shared tasks (when possible).

4. Allow them to Represent what they know in Different Ways

- Be flexible with assessment formats when possible (oral, drawing, matching, **MULTIPLE CHOICE!!**)
- If a student is a great **storyteller**, give dedicated time for them to tell stories (e.g., as a classroom job, in morning meetings, or during “story breaks”). Teach them when storytelling is helpful vs. when to use other strategies. They could also tell stories through puppetry, drama, or other artistic representations.
- If a student is good at **visual/spatial reasoning** (remembering visual information), have them re-design the classroom layout, build models physically (habitats/settings), draw infographics *that everyone could use*.
- If a student is good at **nonverbal problem solving** (figuring things out without relying on words), have them fix things that are broken (like a pencil sharpener), or come up with ways to solve classroom problems, do coding/robotics using visual programming, hands-on ways to demonstrate their learning.
- If a student has a strength in **empathy and social insight** (high emotional intelligence and ability to tune into others’ moods), have them observe or help in group work roles, give them a peer mentorship role (e.g., reading buddy), give them writing tasks that involve writing from the perspective of a character.

Address Blurting out the First Thing that Comes to Mind (or giving random answers):

- **This is a self-soothing or processing aid.**
- **Acknowledge the impulse:** “It’s okay to need time to think. You don’t have to answer right away.”
- **Use non-verbal cue:** Create a cue (like tapping your chin) to remind them to think before responding.
- **Model:** Show *your own thinking process* out loud: “Hmm... let me think about that... oh! I know!”
- **Point out when they succeed!** (when they remember to pause and get the answer in their mind first)
- **Give them notice:** “I’m going to tell you something important. Let me know when you are ready!”
- **Let them know that you understand** when they need you to repeat directions/questions.
- Let them know that their struggles have **NOTHING TO DO** with what they actually know, or how hard they are trying – **consistently praise their HARD WORK and EFFORT!**
- **Use meta-cognition strategies:** Let them know what you notice and see if they notice too – help them understand that they are struggling with “listening/taking in” information, or “saying” what they know, but that doesn’t mean they don’t know the answer. And that doesn’t mean there is anything “wrong”.

Want to learn more about DLD (a disability with understanding and using language)?



<https://www.dldandme.org/#what-is-dld>



<https://radld.org/>



<https://thedldproject.com/>