

Increasing Teacher Listening & Child Talk

Importance of Listening to Children

Talking to teachers and peers allows children to express themselves and build self-confidence. Children who have opportunities to talk in their classrooms can **develop better pro-social skills** and **effective ways to communicate**. Adults are integral supports for children's language development, and **through conversation with teachers**, children **develop both vocabulary and syntax**.

Increased Teacher Listening leads to more opportunities for Child Talk.



Children in classrooms with **teachers who listened** more had greater gains in **Math, Vocabulary, and Letter & Sight Word Recognition**

Children who were observed **talking more frequently** had greater gains in the **above-mentioned skills and Self-Regulation**.

This was **especially true** for children who **entered pre-k with lower skills** than their peers!

Emphasizing Children's Voices

When you want to **get children talking**:

- **Physically get down** on the child's level. Looking up at an adult can be intimidating!
- Show that you **value** children's **home languages**. Learning a simple greeting can greatly increase their comfort level!
- Ask **authentic, open-ended questions**; this elicits more child talk *and* contributes to a **higher level of instruction**.

When it's **time for children to listen**:

- When you need children's attention, emphasize that it is **time for them to listen**, rather than focusing on them being quiet.

- Try using a **song** to get children's attention or implement a **call and response**:

TEACHER:
Listen up!
CHILDREN:
What's up?

TEACHER:
Class-class?
CHILDREN:
Yes-yes?



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Keys to Unlocking Child Talk



Use **authentic** open-ended questions



Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, or those with only one correct answer.

What would happen if...? I wonder.... What do you think about...? Tell me about.... What would you do....? How can we....? How did you....?

Allow **wait time** for children to respond

It takes time for young children to process information and formulate responses! Practice waiting a few beats between asking a question and providing a response or allowing more verbal peers to jump in.



Give **positive acknowledgement**,

Speaking up can feel very risky for children who are shy or not as skilled with language. Keep this in mind, and be enthusiastic about their contributions to the exchange!

I’m excited to hear what Eli has to say! Eli, could you repeat that for your friends?

Marcus, that’s a great suggestion for another ending to the story!

Extend and elaborate children's statements

Instead of correcting children when they say something factually or grammatically incorrect, use your response to extend children’s utterances into complete sentences and provide additional detail:

CHILD: The Wolf goed to the other house made of rocks and he blewed it down too!

TEACHER: Wow, you think the Wolf went to the house made of stone and blew it down? Hmm...What do you think would happen if he couldn't blow the house down?

CHILD: I drive car.
TEACHER: You are driving the car down the road!

Encourage relevant questions and comments from peers

Highlighting and comparing children’s responses reminds them to listen closely to their peers and practice good conversation skills.

Jade, it sounds like you agree with Charlie's idea that the Big Bad Wolf wasn't so bad after all. What do other people think?

Provide **additional support** and scaffolding when necessary

Some children are more naturally inclined to engage in conversation with adults and peers. It takes conscious effort to draw children with lower language skills into verbal interactions.

Use picture cards to help children make requests or tell stories

Pair common phrases with sign language or translations from children’s home language

Use predictable phrases or songs to elicit utterances:

TEACHER: Ready, set....

CHILD: /g/

TEACHER: That's right, GO!



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Creating Environments to Support Child Talk

Adapted from Guest Blog Posts by Mendy Coe & Teneice “Neicy” Kirby

Arrival & Dismissal

Get to know your students!
Send home an interest inventory or ask about their families and favorite things.

Meals

In addition to encouraging social talk, meals are also natural opportunities to discuss children’s favorite foods, how foods are made, and their nutritional properties.

- *What’s your favorite food? Why?*
- *How do you think they made this?*
- *Why do you think we need to eat vegetables?*

Free Choice Centers

- **Dramatic Play** – let the child pretend to be the “adult”, and you are the child
- **Blocks** – ask questions about what they are building and why. “How can I help?” Have students interview each other about what they built
- **Discovery** —get EXCITED about what you see through the magnifying glass; this will spark children’s curiosity and inspire conversation.

Small Group

Provide mutual experiences from which you and the children can draw

- **Leverage children’s experiences and background knowledge.** Start activities by asking children what they know about a topic. They might surprise you!
- Plan a **special activity** such as cooking from a recipe or conducting an experiment.
- Talk to children about their **journaling** pages while they work.

“What’s happening here?”

Morning & Afternoon Meeting

- Develop and teach expectations for participating in group conversation.

“How can we show Jason we care about what he has to say?”

- Let children **lead parts of the routine**
“Does anyone have questions for Sara?”
- Bring in **unusual, real-world objects** to spark conversations!

Storytime

Incorporate **quality children’s literature** and take time to **examine vocabulary**. Choose literature that is linked to the current topic of study so that children use new words in the context of classroom activities.

The **Book Discussion Cards** provided by Creative Curriculum give excellent examples of open-ended questions!

When asking these questions, remember:

- ★ Allow sufficient wait time for response
- ★ Positively acknowledge contributions
- ★ Extend and elaborate
- ★ Provide additional support and scaffolding when necessary
- ★

Managing off-topic comments can be challenging!
Try to differentiate responses based on the child:

For a child who rarely contributes:

Encourage participation and find a way to ask more questions

For a child who often contributes:

Identify a link between child’s comment and current topic —OR— Ask them to tell more about it later, and bring attention back to topic at hand.

Set aside a time for children to come talk to you.

