Prepare Your Preschoolers for School Success:  
Listening Skills and Independence are the Key

Kindergarten teachers report that while children need the skills of knowing numbers, letters, and colors for early school success, it is also critical that they develop the ability to work independently and to be good listeners. In order for students to become more prepared for kindergarten, early learning programs must establish daily routines that focus on listening skills, include following simple directions, and offer opportunities to become more independent. Below are some activity ideas to build these important social skills that can be easily applied in the classroom.

Turn on those “Listening Ears!”

☀ Teacher Talk
- Be a good listener yourself.
- Call the child’s name before giving a direction or asking a question.
- Always make eye contact with the child and teach children to do the same.
- After reading, ask your students to retell the story.
- At times, give instructions only once. (So often teachers repeat directions over and over, which does not encourage careful listening.)
- While on the carpet, have a designated space for every child to sit.

☀ Cues: Use fun phrases, songs, or rhymes to get the students’ attention.
- “1, 2, 3–eyes on me!”
- “If you can hear me… (add activity).” Repeat getting softer and softer each time. Or start softly until all children are following along.
- “Zip it, Lock it, Put it in my Pocket!” Zip lips and put the key in your pocket.
- Use a Special Puppet that only comes out during the times when children need to listen very carefully.
- “Shh” or “Brain Sprinkles.” Decorate a can (i.e. Pringles container) and add jingle bells inside. When you need children to listen, sprinkle the “sprinkles” on top of them. Use “Shh Sprinkles” to not be loud; and “Brain Sprinkles” to think and listen.
- Use “Hips and Lips” to have students put one hand on hip and the other on their lips.
- Talking Object. Students cannot talk unless they are holding the special object.
Activities / Games: Play games using verbal directions as a way to help children develop listening skills while making it fun and interesting.

- **Sound Bottles:** Fill 8 small, matching containers with food or other items such as rice, dried beans, pennies, etc. (make two cans of each). Seal cans and have children try to find the matching sounds.

- **Hose Commands:** With a section of garden hose, have a child stand at each end. One listens while the other talks through the other end, giving a command (i.e. stand on one foot). Another option is to have one child go at a time while you give the command through the hose.

- **Tin Can Telephones:** Punch a hole in the bottom of each can. Thread twelve feet of wire through the holes. Wind each end in and out of a button. One child talks at a time while the other holds the can over their ear to listen.

- **Master Game:** During circle time, play this game using 3 objects that make different sounds, such as a wooden spoon, a sponge, or a metal object. One child will be the master and sit in a chair with eyes closed. The other children will chant, "Master, Master, do you hear? Someone's coming very near!" The teacher will choose a child to drop one of the objects, and the master will guess which object was dropped by listening to the sound.

- Go on a *Listening Walk* outside, through the room, or in the building.

- **Identify Sounds in the Room:** Have children close their eyes, then turn off the lights, open the door, open a drawer, turn on the water, or cut paper with scissors. Children will guess what sound they heard.

- **Listening Center:** Have books on tape for children to listen to. Another option is to have different objects for children to tap or drop. Talk about which make louder sounds, and which make softer sounds.

### Following Directions

**Teacher Talk**

- Break tasks/activities into small steps. Praise the student for completing each task in order to motivate him/her to move on to the next.

- Provide visual cue cards of directions. Teach, model, and post at the students’ level.

- Model each direction for the students and provide just enough support to help the children move forward.

- Give all directions first and then have children tell you what they are going to be doing. In other words, have them repeat the directions back to you.

- For a twist, give directions for a familiar routine/activity in a mixed-up order. Ask the students to tell you them in the correct order.

- Ask the children what you should do to complete a task.

- When learning a new skill, such as tying shoelaces, make up a rhyme or song to help children remember the steps.
Games / Activities:

- Build an Obstacle Course where children must remember what to do at each station after going through it together. Another option is to have children tell their classmates what their next move is to be.

- Play Simon Says and Red-Light, Green-Light.

- Make Simple Crafts where children have to follow directions to complete the project.

- Listen to songs that incorporate following directions, such as “The Hokey Pokey.”

- Block Game: Spread out a square napkin on a table. Using small blocks, have children follow directions to use the blocks in different ways. Examples: Put a block in each corner, line up 5 blocks in a row, stack 4 blocks, make a T with the blocks, etc.

- Hot and Cold: Choose a familiar classroom object and hide it while one child closes their eyes. As the child looks for the object, say whether they are hot or cold depending on their distance to the object.

Working Independently: Stimulates Learning and Builds Self-Esteem!

Daily Routines - Establish routines from the beginning so that, as the year progresses, children are automatically becoming more independent as they don’t need constant reminders and can function on their own.

- Each day your students come into the classroom they should have daily routines. These might include placing check-in tags on a bulletin board, marking what they want to drink at snack, checking mail, or putting on a name tag.

Learning Stations

- Design fun, hands-on centers and activities that reflect students’ current skills and interests to promote self-directed play.
  - Literacy Station: this might include stamps, markers, stencils, pencils, paper, etc.
  - Listening Station: this might include books on tape and headphones.
  - Manipulatives: puzzles, counting bears, felt boards, board games, and Lego’s are great for this station.
  - Discovery Station: include science inquiry tools and hands-on projects.

Ideas through a Creative Curriculum

- Create a Print-Rich Classroom: Put posters around the room that have pictures of multi-step directions on how to wash hands, clean up, and toilet.

- Music and Movement: Include plenty of engaging music that requires each student to participate and follow directions!

- Interactive Read Alouds: Read books that give students an active listening role. Direct them to listen to the story and wait for their turn to participate.

- Use Songs and Rhymes: Play a specific song as a cue for when it is time to clean up or get ready for nap.
Ideas through a Creative Curriculum (cont.)

- **Utilize Student Helpers**: Have specific children that help serve snack, mark the calendar, and assist the teacher with special tasks each day. This creates excitement for responsibility!

- **Visual Cue Cards**: such as a “Hand-washing Visual,” to use with children having difficulty with self-help skills. Post at the child’s level for easy use and prompting.

- Provide a quiet, screened area to minimize distractions for children who have trouble staying focused on a task.

- Give children who have trouble sleeping “nap boxes” with small toys and activities for self-directed play.

- Post a chart with self-help skills listed along with children’s names. Check off each skill as it can be done.

- Give a small “prize,” compliment, or certificate when you observe a child completing a task or activity independently or following a routine without prompting.

- During meal times, offer drinks that children can pour or open for themselves. Have either the fruit or vegetable served family-style so students learn to pass and serve themselves.

- If students are unable to complete a certain task, have another child explain to them how to do it. They might explain it in a new way that makes sense to the child.

This document was developed through a partnership between the Butler County Early Care & Education Council and Grove City College Students. Additional activity ideas were also provided by early childhood teachers from Peek-a-boo Playhouse and Giggles & Grins.