

INTRODUCTION

What Is This Program?

This program consists of a series of stimulating and practical lessons designed to help children learn *how* to listen more effectively in a large group setting. Teaching a child how to learn in a conscious way is called a metacognitive approach. This program also provides valuable tips to help the teacher with the meaningful integration of these skills throughout the school day, informational letters to parents, and follow-up activities for the speech–language pathologist (SLP) to use with those students who may need additional practice.

Who Should Use This Program?

Classroom teachers, speech–language pathologists, and special education teachers will all find this program valuable.

For What Ages and Abilities Are These Materials Designed?

This program is designed for use in a classroom or group setting. The activities are targeted for children with weak auditory and attending skills, caused by conditions such as central auditory processing disorders (CAPD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), learning disabilities, Asperger’s syndrome, or high-functioning autism. It is also an excellent program to use in a regular classroom for “whole-class” or collaborative instruction to improve the class’s overall listening behavior. The interest level is approximately Grades 2–6, but the materials can be easily adapted for older or younger students. Children with identified auditory processing disorders will most likely require more intensive auditory therapy. This program is meant to complement this therapeutic intervention, not replace it.

How Should the Program Be Used?

This program contains weekly classroom-based lessons for an entire academic year. Before beginning, the teacher or SLP may want to fill out the Pre- and Postobservational Checklist, in order to be able to gauge a class’s progress (or that of a specific student) at the end of the program.

The core of the program has two elements. The teacher is guided through how to present verbal information effectively to children with weak auditory and attending skills. The students learn to recognize the obstacles to listening, and learn creative ways to overcome them. This metacognitive approach gives the class a variety of strategies to improve their ability to attend, remember, and process what they hear.

Before beginning the program, the teacher should read Chapter 2, “The Listening Process,” and Chapter 3, “Teaching Strategies To Help Problem Listeners in the Classroom.” Integrating the listening skills into everyday, naturalistic contexts is essential to the success of the program. If a speech–language pathologist (or other specialist) is the primary instructor for this program, the classroom teacher will need to watch how the skills are taught so that they may be reinforced at the appropriate times. A short meeting to discuss the goals of the program can help prepare the classroom teacher for his or her upcoming role. Sometimes a staff mini-workshop on the program is also a good introduction and motivator.

The program consists of seven instructional units. Chapter 5, “Preparing To Listen: Attending to the Teacher,” should be taught first. The other units may be selected according to the needs of the student or class. Within each instructional unit, several lessons address targeted concepts. Each lesson is sequenced to build on the previous one, so the lessons should be taught in the order provided. A teacher can modify the materials and presentation of the lessons to suit the class’s unique interests and needs, as long as the important concepts from the lessons are preserved.

After teaching each unit, you can use the “Goals Assessment” checklist found at the end of each chapter to evaluate a student’s or class’s understanding and application of the unit’s objectives. Each unit also contains a letter to send home to the parents in order to help the child at home practice and integrate the skills learned. Students requiring further instruction may benefit from the activities suggested in the “Reinforcement Activities for the Speech–Language Pathologist” section of each unit. These activities provide additional reinforcement and can be used in a small group setting either in the classroom or in the speech room. However, these activities should not take the place of whole-class instruction; in fact, this program has been most effective when whole-class instruction is the primary instructional model.

How Was This Program Developed?

The lessons in this program were developed by a speech–language pathologist based on current theory, preferred practices, and demonstrated effectiveness. Most lessons were field-tested in several schools in Connecticut. Further refinements were made as the program was used.

What Is the Rationale Behind This Program?

Children already spend enormous amounts of time listening in school. They don’t lack opportunities to practice listening. What they do need is sequenced, organized instruction that will help them learn *how* to listen better in the very place they need to do it best: the classroom. Teaching a child how to think about learning—a metacognitive approach—is the cornerstone of this program.

Experience and research (Pearson & Fielding, 1982) have shown that integrating listening skills into a meaningful and natural context is not always best achieved in the confines of a small, quiet speech room. As a result, the consultative/collaborative model has evolved over the past few years. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) describes this model in its position statement:

Collaborative consultation is a service delivery option in which the speech–language pathologist, regular and/or special education teacher(s), and parents voluntarily work together to facilitate a student’s communication and learning in educational environments. (ASHA 1993, p. 33)

In some cases, this model serves a student in lieu of a pull-out program; in others, it serves as an added component. One advantage of this service delivery model is that the speech–language pathologist can work directly with the classroom teacher to develop strategies that will minimize the impact of auditory deficits on a child’s functioning in the mainstream. After all, the acoustic environment and presentation of verbal information in the classroom can significantly affect a child’s academic success.

As teachers become more knowledgeable about the listening process, they will have the tools to adapt their teaching styles to the needs of a variety of students. Children with attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, hearing impairments, emotional disturbances, and those who speak English as a second language would also benefit from a teacher’s increased knowledge of listening skills.

For the child receiving speech and language therapy, the generalization of learned skills and strategies is always the primary long-term goal. What better way to facilitate this step than in the classroom itself? Many children are able to attend and follow directions superbly in the confines of a quiet speech room. However, listening in a large, noisy group for long periods of time presents not only greater challenges but also very different ones. For clinicians to duplicate these distractions and demands in a small speech room is difficult, if not impossible. Going into the classroom and/or instructing the classroom teacher allows SLPs to close that gap.

Cooperative learning lessons are included in this program—Chapter 6, “Attending and Listening to Peers,” and Chapter 11, “Staying on Topic During Discussions”—to facilitate practice with listening skills and pragmatics. Because cooperative learning groups are quickly becoming an integral part of today’s classrooms, the classroom teacher can use these lessons to accomplish several educational goals at one time.