



Help your

Child Succeed

*5 Important Skills*



**Linda Mitchell, PhD** has been dedicated to the development and learning of young children for most of her life. She has more than 40 years of experience as a parent, teacher and speech-language pathologist. Her passion for helping both professional educators and parents led her to earn a PhD and pursue a career as a professor of education.

*“This book is my way of giving back to all of the families I have partnered with and learned from throughout my career. I value all they do every day for their children.”*

*– Linda Mitchell*



**1**  
**Listening**

**2**  
**Following Directions**

**3**  
**Making Choices**

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**Taking Turns**

**5**  
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## *How to Use This Book*

We know that children learn by watching, listening, and interacting with their family members.

This book provides five important skills you can share with your child to help them succeed in school and throughout their lives. You can teach and model these skills every day and in any setting. Children naturally want to follow their parents' lead.

For each skill, this book will help you understand what it is, explain how to help your child learn the skill, and give several examples.

The best part is that talking about and practicing these skills with your child will not only make them better learners, but will also improve your relationship with them at home.



# 1

## Listening

# Listening

Children who know how to listen tend to excel in learning. There is a real difference, however, between just hearing and truly listening. Hearing is the ability to take in sounds. Listening means paying attention with an intent to understand.

To truly understand someone, we must go deeper than just the words they say. Listening means paying attention to their **words** and the **feelings** behind their words.

Good listening skills help children to

- Gain information
- Improve understanding
- Build relationships
- Increase enjoyment
- Develop self-awareness





→ *Hearing*

*Words*



+



→

*Listening*

*Words*

*Feelings*



# How to help your child learn to listen

One of the best ways to teach your child how to listen is to **model** it for them:

1. Pay full attention to your child when they speak to you.
2. Let your child know that you have understood both their words and their feelings.

## Tips

- Turn your body toward your child.
- Make eye contact.
- Do not multitask, so that you can pay full attention to your child.
- Respond to both their words and their feelings





# Hearing vs. Listening: Examples

## *Example 1*

A child comes home and announces:  
“I hate school, and I am never going back.”

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** “You WILL go back to school tomorrow!”

**Listening:** “It sounds like you had a hard day at school today. Tell me what happened.”

## Example 2

A parent is walking a child home from school. The child says: "I ran faster than all of my friends."

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** "That's nice."

**Listening:** "You are really good at running. Where were you when you were racing your friends?"

## Example 3

A parent is kicking a ball back and forth with a child. The child says: "I cannot get the ball when you kick it so hard."

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** "Try harder to get those fast ones."

**Listening:** "When I kick it too hard, it probably goes too fast for you. Let me try kicking it again, but not so hard."

### Example 4

A parent and child are at the marketplace. The parent is talking with another adult. The child says, "Can we go home now?"

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** "Be quiet."

**Listening:** "You must be getting tired and hungry. I will be done talking in a minute, and then we'll go home."

### Example 5

A parent and child are shopping at the market. The child says: "I will pick out the tomatoes for us today."

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** "No tomatoes today."

**Listening:** "I am sorry, we are not buying tomatoes today, but you can pick out the peppers and the onions we need, as you are my best helper."



## Example 6

A family member is sharing a banana with a child. The child says: "I want my own banana."

*Possible Responses:*

**Hearing:** "You only get half."

**Listening:** "You must be really hungry. Let's share this banana and then go look for something else we can eat."

Transforming **hearing**  
into **listening** makes  
**learning** more effective.



# 2

## Following Directions

# Following Directions

Children may not always follow the directions we give them. This can be frustrating not only for parents and teachers, but also for the child.

The skill of following directions helps children become better learners and helps routines and activities move smoothly—at home and at school. It also helps with:

- Completing tasks and projects
- Following rules
- Participating in groups
- Staying safe





# Why do children not follow directions?

They may struggle to follow directions if they:

1. Are not motivated
2. Feel it is too difficult
3. Hear a question rather than directions

## 1. Motivation

Children will be more motivated to follow directions if they see how they will benefit. One way to help them is to use the “First-Then” method:

**First**, tell them what you want them to do.

**Then**, tell them what they can do next that they want to do.



### Example 1

A mother wants her son to pick up his toys and put them away. She knows this is not something he wants to do.

She says: “**First** put your toys in the toy box, **then** we can play outside together.”

### Example 2

A grandfather is going to feed the animals with his granddaughter. He wants her to help him, but she just wants to pet the animals.

He says: “**First**, bring me that bucket, and **then** you can pet the animals.”



## 2. Difficulty

Sometimes children feel directions are too difficult if they are told to do several things at once.

For example, a parent might say, “Go get your coat, bring it here, and put it on.” They think they are giving one direction, but in fact they are giving three:

1. Go get your coat.
2. Bring it here.
3. Put it on.

To help your child, **break directions into small steps** that they can easily accomplish.



## Example 1

A father and son are going to a ballgame together. The father knows his son cannot follow complex directions.

Father says: "Put on your shirt and pants." He waits until his son is done. Then he says: "Put on your shoes." He waits, and then says: "Get your hat. We are ready to go."

## Example 2

A girl wants to draw a picture of a dog. Someone told her all the directions at once and she failed, so she thinks she cannot do it. Her brother wants to help her.

He says: "I will show you how to draw a dog. First, draw a small circle like this for the head." He waits for his sister to do it. Then he says: "Now draw a larger circle here for the body." He continues explaining and showing each step until both have drawn a dog. He ends with, "You did it!"

### 3. Directions, not questions

Parents sometimes use questions when they intend to give directions. However, questions may be interpreted by the child as a choice, to which they can say “yes” or “no.”

To help your child understand it is a direction, **tell, don't ask.**



## Example 1

A father is ready to take his daughter to the market, but she does not have on her shoes.

**Asking:** Father says, “Are you ready to put on your shoes?” She hears it as a choice and says “no.”

**Telling:** Father says, “Time to go, put on your shoes.” She hears it as a direction, so she puts on her shoes.

## Example 2

A mother wants her children to come inside to eat dinner.

**Asking:** “Time to eat! Are you ready to come inside?” This gives the children the option to say “no.”

**Telling:** “It’s dinner time! Come inside and eat.”



# 3

## Making Choices

# *Making Choices*

We all want to help our children learn to make choices that will help them succeed.

A child's learning is greatly enhanced when they can make choices and then learn from the consequences of their choices.

Learning to make choices helps children with

- Problem-solving
- Independent thinking
- Accepting responsibility
- Self-esteem
- Self-reliance





**Here are two ways you  
can help your child  
learn to make choices:**

- 1.** Modeling how you make choices
- 2.** Giving your child opportunities to make choices



## Modeling

Children learn by example. So, you can help them by talking out loud about a choice you are making.

Talk about how and why you are making the choice and the possible outcomes.



### Example 1

A child has been asking to go to the park. The parent says, “It would have been fun to go to the park today, but if we go now it will be dark soon after we get there. We won’t have much time to play. So, a better choice would be for us to go tomorrow.”

### Example 2

A mother and her daughter have just made cookies together. The mother says: “The cookies smell so good, I’d like to eat a lot of them. But if I did, I would probably get a stomachache. So, a better choice would be to eat just one.”





# Giving Children Choices

In some situations, parents need their children to do what they tell them to do. However, when it is possible to give children choices, it is beneficial for their development and learning.

## To help your child learn to make choices:

- Give only 2-3 options
- Stick with the options
- The choice is final
- Respect the choice
- Praise good choices

## Give only 2-3 options

Young children are better able to make choices with 2-3 options. Older children can be given more options.

### *Example 1*

A father and son are at a park. The father says, "Which would you like to do first: eat the lunch we packed, or play on the swings?"

### *Example 2*

A mother is going to tell her child a story. The mother says, "Where would you like to sit while you listen: on the bed, on the floor, or on a chair?"

## Stick with the options

Children need to learn how to choose from limited options. So, after giving options, don't add to or change them.

### *Example 1*

A child asks for a snack. The parent offers an orange or a banana, but the child says, "I want a cookie." The parent says, "Maybe next time you can have a cookie. Your choices this time are an orange or a banana."

### *Example 2*

A mother and child are going for a walk. The mother says: "Do you want to walk to your friend's house, or to Grandmother's house?" The child says: "We could also go to the market or to the park." The parent says: "The choices today are your friend's house or Grandmother's house. Which one do you choose?"





# The Choice is Final

When children have to stick with their choice and not change it, they learn more about choices and consequences.

## Example 1

A grandfather tells his granddaughter she can choose a treat at the market. She chooses an apple, so he buys her one. Later she says: "No, grandfather, I want raisins, not an apple." The grandfather replies: "You already chose an apple. Next time, you can choose raisins."

## Example 2

A mother says to her son, "Which do you want to wear today, your blue shirt or your purple shirt?" The son chooses the blue shirt. When it is time to leave for school, the son says, "I don't want my blue shirt, I want the purple one!" The mother replies, "You already chose the blue one. You can choose the purple shirt tomorrow."

## Respect the Choice

Children need to learn to think for themselves. So when a child makes a choice, accept it.

### *Example 1*

A mother says to her daughter, "It is time to pick up your toys. Which do you want to put away first, the balls or the blocks?" The daughter chooses to pick up the blocks first.

*Not respecting the choice:*

The mother says, "There are more balls, so start with them first."

*Respecting the choice:*

The mother says, "Okay, pick up the blocks first."

## Example 2

A son says to his father, "Tell me a story!"  
The father says, "I'll give you a choice.  
Would you like a story about your  
grandfather, or about me when I was your  
age?" The son says, "Tell me a story about  
grandfather."

*Not respecting the choice:*

The father says: "I've told you many stories  
about your grandfather. Let me share one  
about me."

*Respecting the choice:*

The father says: "Okay, here's a story  
about your grandfather."





# 4

## Taking Turns



## Taking Turns

To be successful, children need to learn how to interact with others. Learning to take turns helps them in everyday interactions—like talking, sharing, waiting in line, or playing games.

Taking turns builds many skills that are useful in school and beyond, like:

- Self-control
- Patience
- Negotiating
- Sharing
- Making and keeping friends



## Here are two tips for helping your child practice taking turns:

1. Use words like: “your turn, my turn.”
2. Create ways to help the child **wait** for their turn.



# “Your turn, my turn”

## Example 1

A father and daughter are practicing kicking a ball. The father says, “Let’s take turns kicking the ball; your turn first.” After his daughter takes her turn, the father says: “Okay, now give me the ball, it’s my turn.” The daughter says: “No, I want the ball.” The father says, “Remember, we are taking turns. You had a turn, and now it is my turn.”

## Example 2

A sister is reading to her younger brother. He likes to hold the book and do all the talking about what he sees on each page. The sister says: “Let’s take turns reading and talking about the pictures. You can have the first turn. Then it will be my turn.” After the brother talks about a page, the sister says: “Very good! Now it is my turn to read and talk about this page.” The sister continues to remind the younger brother when it is his turn or her turn.

# Helping the child wait for their turn

## *Example 1*

A sister is playing with a toy. Her brother wants to play with the same toy, but she doesn't want to share it. Their mother says to her, "Let's take turns playing with the toy. I will set a timer for five minutes. When the timer goes off, your turn will be over, and you will give the toy to your brother. Then I will set the timer again, so we will know when his turn is over."

## *Example 2*

A grandmother is waiting in a long line with her grandson, and he is getting impatient. She knows that he likes word games. So, she says, "Let's play a word game while we're waiting for our turn."





# 5

## Perseverance





# Perseverance

For children to experience the joy of learning and growth, perseverance is essential.

Throughout life, children will be tempted to give up when things seem hard for them. Children who learn to keep on trying until they attain their goal are much more likely to succeed in school and beyond.



## Perseverance helps children by building:

- Problem-solving skills
- Proactivity
- Self-confidence
- Self-discipline
- Feelings of accomplishment

## Here are some ideas that help a child learn perseverance:

- Breaking a task or skill into smaller steps
- Keeping at it
- Practicing to reach a goal
- Finishing what you start
- Celebrating successes



# Examples

## Breaking a task or skill into smaller steps

Two brothers have been given a new puzzle. The younger brother says, "I can't do this. It has too many pieces." The older brother says: "We can do this, don't give up. We just need to do one step at a time. First, let's look at the picture on the box. Then we'll find the corner pieces. We can do a little bit each day. I'll teach you the steps."

## Keeping at it

A girl tries to ride a bike for the first time, and falls over. She tells her father, "I can't do it. I'll never ride a bike!" Her father says, "I understand. When I was learning to ride a bike, I had to try many times before it worked. My dad helped me by holding the bike for a bit and then letting go. Why don't we try that?" After several tries, the girl is still falling over. She says, "See? I just can't do it." Her father says, "You're getting better! Each time you go a little further on your own. I know you can do this." They keep trying, and soon the girl can ride on her own.

## Practicing

A boy hears his grandfather playing drums and says, “I want to learn how to play like you.” His grandfather says, “I had to practice every day for a long time to learn to play like this. I can teach you, but you will also have to practice every day.” The boy says, “Okay, grandfather, if that’s what it takes, I will do it.” After much practice, the boy and grandfather can play a song together.

## Finishing what you start

A girl says to her father, “I want to learn how to make a kite.” The father says, “Yes, that would be fun. Let’s do it.” Before they are finished, the girl says, “This is taking too long. I want to go play with my friends now.” Her father says, “If we finish the kite, then you could show it to your friends and fly it. Let’s finish what we have started.” They finish making the kite, and then the girl proudly shows her friends.

## Celebrating success

A boy says to his parents, “Look what I made in school! The teacher told us to make our favorite animal with clay. I wanted to make a bird. It was really hard and took a long time, but I kept trying until I got it right.” His parents say, “That’s wonderful! You worked hard and didn’t give up. We’re so proud of you! Let’s celebrate by putting your bird on the table where everyone can see it.”





Practice

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