

Promoting Learning

by **Dr. Marvin Marshall**

Listening Lessons

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How to Help Kids Learn and Comprehend

Listening is a largely untaught skill that applies to every subject in school and is of paramount importance in good relationships.

I recently spoke to 65 middle level students in a major urban area. The students were using a section of my book, "**Discipline without Stress, Punishments, or Rewards,**" as a source for their conflict resolution discussions. I was there by their invitation and was treated as a celebrity. Almost all wanted my signature. Nevertheless, during my presentation, I felt it necessary to use an attention management approach five times with two variations just to bring their attention back after I made a point or told a story to emphasize a point.

The principal commented afterwards that poor listening skills are what the teachers face on a daily basis.

For a number of reasons, this generation of students needs to be taught active listening skills. Listening with attention--let alone reflection--is mechanical and uncomfortable for many of them. It's like learning how to retype using both hands.

Here are some suggestions for increasing students' attention spans and listening skills.

Teach the five "W's" and the "H." Anything they hear--whether it's a song on the radio or a lecture from a teacher--has a who, what, where, why, when, and a how.

After listening to the five W's" and the "H," students next focus on details. It's not just a bike; it's green with a hard seat, thin tires, shiny spokes, and low handlebars.

After a writing assignment using these factors, have students share what they have written. The listeners repeat what they have heard.

Have students work in small groups using the old rumor clinic approach. Here is how it works. One person is selected to leave the group to return later as the final reporter. One person starts by very quietly whispering a descriptive message to the next person. This process of whispering the message continues until the last person repeats it to the final listener--the person who was in a different location during the sharing process. This student then repeats what was just shared with her/him to the entire group. Students will readily get the point of how important attentive listening is for accurate communications and understanding.

Have students paraphrase to a learning buddy what you have just taught. Then have the learning buddy repeat it.

In small groups, have students practice listening for what is the same and what is different, for points with which they agree and for points in which they disagree. Have them share their thoughts.

Create a series of cards containing what you want students to learn. Note: Students can make the cards from the lessons taught.) Students work in groups of four. The first student picks a card. The card is handed to the second student who makes a question from the contents on the card. The third student answers the question. The fourth student restates the question and paraphrases what the previous student said. The cards rotate so that the second person then picks a card, and the process continues.

Remember to use unobtrusive approaches. For example, a teacher can oftentimes tell if students are listening by watching their eyes. If the eyes remain fixed with no blinking or the student is not looking at the teacher or taking notes, the student is vacationing someplace else. Move near the student's desk, call on a student next to her/him, or use the student's name in a sentence.

Although in some subcultures where looking down or away when an authority figure is speaking is the norm, teach that in American culture looking directly at the person shows respect and attention. Looking directly at the person speaking also makes focusing on listening so much easier.

Not much instructional time needs to be invested in listening activities. Short activities practiced regularly are the most effective approach to have students learn one of the most important skills in school and life.

Ideas for implementing the discipline system that promotes both responsibility and learning using concepts of **proaction** (Stephen Covey), **noncoercion** (William Glasser), **collaboration** and **empowerment** (W. Edwards Deming) and **hierarchy** and **autonomy** (Abraham Maslow) is described at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com>

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