

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.

—Ralph G. Nichols



EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning

Active or Whole Body Listening

Level: Lower Elementary (K-2)

Timeframe: 15-20 minutes

- Concepts:**
- Active Listening
 - Communication Skills
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Whole Body Listening



Big Ideas For This Lesson

As adults, we know from experience that no person is capable of listening to every instruction 100% of the time. Our students need to hear that we do not expect them to always listen. Attention, and the willpower to direct our attention, is a finite resource. Constant listening and attention is an impossible task. Operating from this mindset, we can negate the commonly held belief that students “choose not to listen,” and instead focus on proactive strategies for engaging students and encouraging active listening. So what is a fair expectation around listening? Today we will define listening, discuss listening limitations, set expectations as a class around listening, and learn specific skills that support listening.

Listening is a teachable skill. Research shows that people who have been [taught to listen are better at it](#).¹ Being taught to listen occurs formally and informally. Students have also learned lessons that hinder listening. For example, a parent might ask their child, “How was your day today?” while scrolling through their phone. Modeling like this teaches the child that it is acceptable to pretend to listen while preoccupied with another task. Getting better at appearing to listen is the implicit message. As teachers, how often do we model pretend-listening?



Essential Vocabulary

Active Listening
Body Language
Clarifying Questions
Hearing vs. Receiving
Whole Body Listening

Materials

- Anchor chart and markers.
- Baggies, Lego pieces, visual barriers.
- Active Listening: SEL Journal Page and a pencil.
- Active Listening Themed Read-Aloud (Optional): [Whole Body Listening Larry at School!](#) by Elizabeth Sautter and Kristen Wilson



Preparation

1. Read through and familiarize yourself with the lesson and games.
2. Prepare two baggies of identical Lego pieces and a visual barrier (e.g., a stiff folder) for each partnership.



Teaching Script

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

Teaching Note: Think of your own examples of listening and non-listening. By letting students in on your own successes and shortcomings with friends and family, you will build relationships and trust. Since no one can be a perfect listener, it helps to admit your own shortcomings.

As a warm up listening activity, play a game of “**Simon (or Teacher) Says**” or the “**Fidget Family**”² (directions included at the end of this lesson).

| *What did you have to do in those games to be successful? What helped you?*

Remind students of the lesson on Mindful Listening.

| *Remember when we learned how to use mindful listening to calm our bodies down and focus our attention? This week we are going to learn another skill called active, or whole body, listening. Listening is a skill that you can learn! We do a lot of listening in school and so it's important to learn how to do it well.*

Have a quick discussion with the students about what it means to listen for understanding. Listening is often narrowly thought of as “sounds or words we hear.” Take time to lead a question-based discussion with your class that expands this definition to “**hearing AND receiving**” the speaker’s message –spoken or unspoken.

| *Listening is more than just hearing with our ears! When we listen, our brain gets a message. And that means we need to pay attention.*

Create a visual anchor chart with your students showing what active or whole body listening looks like.

| *When we are active or whole body listeners, we are showing others that we are listening for understanding. What do you think active or whole body listening looks like? Sounds like? Feels like?*

Teaching Note: Your chart ought to be specific to what your students come up with, but might include concepts such as:

- Eyes on the Speaker
- Ears Listening for Important Parts
- Mouth Quiet
- Body Still (or Feet on the Ground/Criss-Cross, Hands in Lap)
- Curious Mind Thinking Carefully About What You’re Hearing

Depending on the skill level and developmental age of your class, you may also include concepts such as:

- Head Nodding
- Asking Clarifying Questions
- Re-stating What the Speaker Said (I heard you say...)



GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

Practice having active listening or whole bodies listening together as a class.

Let's try it all together. Everyone relax your bodies, dangle your hands, and drop your head. When I say 'GO' get into your best active or whole body listening. Ready, set, GO!

Teaching Note: Allow students to get a little silly with this, maybe laying all the way down on the floor to get out of their active or whole body listening and then quickly getting back into it. Practice it a few times.



REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Explain to students that they will now practice this active or whole body listening with a fun activity. Model the following activity with another teacher or student. Activity adapted from: [Learning to Listen](#).³

- a. Students will work in partners and each receive an identical Ziploc bag of Lego pieces and a visual barrier to put between them (stiff folders work well).
- b. One student will be the speaker and the other child will be the active or whole body listener.
- c. The speaker first builds a structure with the Lego pieces, being careful not to let the listener see it.
- d. Then the speaker gives oral directions so that the listener can build the same exact structure with his/her Lego pieces. The listener must stay in their active or whole body listening as much as possible while working with the Lego pieces.
- e. The listener is allowed to ask questions if confused, but is not allowed to look over the barrier to see the structure.
- f. Once they are done and ready to check, they can take down the barrier and see if they were successful.
- g. Next, they switch roles and repeat the activity.

Teaching Note: The younger the students, the fewer Lego pieces there should be in their bags. Start with as few as 2-3 pieces so that students feel successful. Also, the students do not have to work with Lego pieces. They can try to duplicate each other's drawings, use other building materials, e.g., toothpicks and marshmallows or use math manipulatives such as Geoboards or pattern blocks.

Once all students have had a turn as both the listener and the speaker, bring them back together for a reflection. Sit in a circle and ask students how the activity went.

Did anyone build the same Lego structure? What helped you to be successful? What was hard?

Reinforce with students that we do our best listening with our active or whole body listening. When that happens, our brains receive messages loud and clear!



EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

Reflect on it

- *How do you feel when someone pretends to listen to you?*
- *What is the most difficult active or whole body listening skill for you? What skill are you best at?*
- *How often do you listen closely to the speaker?*
- *When is it most challenging to listen to a story from a friend, directions from a teacher, or questions from a parent?*

Journal it

Have students complete the [Active Listening: SEL Journal Page](#), drawing their own picture of an active or whole body listener.



EXTENSIONS

Classroom

- Put up your active or whole body listening anchor chart in the area of your classroom where students will be doing the most listening.
- During instruction, acknowledge active or whole body listening skills in action. Be specific.
- Play the [Sounds Right: The Listening Game](#) ⁴ with students.
- Use [The Listening Song](#) ⁵ for transitions or brain breaks.

School-wide

- In staff meetings bring attention to the importance of listening to students. This sounds obvious, however, we all forget to slow down and attend to the needs students are expressing.
- Encourage active listening in meetings. Work to improve communication in team meetings by modeling active listening.
- Create templates for meetings that identify main points and assign roles, e.g., note taker, recorder, facilitator, time keeper, etc.
- Listening especially applies to the teacher-parent relationship. Before delivering information to the parent, listen to their concerns first. Also identify and address any implicit messages from parents.



REFERENCES

1. Active Listening. (1998). Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, USA. Retrieved October 24, 2015 from <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/activel.htm>
2. Roser, Suan Lattanzi (2009). Energizers! 88 quick movement activities that refresh and refocus. Thunder Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (Fidget Family source).
3. Knight, A. (2014, July 20). Creating Readers and Writers. Retrieved from <http://creatingreadersandwriters.blogspot.com/2014/07/first-week-favorites-say-what.html>
4. Freeman, D. (2011, March 23). Sounds Right: A Mindful Listening Game. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RQpXg-vXv0
5. A Merry Mom. (2014, April 28). Discovering helpful music for kids: The Listening Song - A Merry Mom. Retrieved from <http://www.amerrymom.com/2014/04/listening-song/>

THE FIDGET FAMILY

Assign each student (or groups of students) to be one of the characters in the story. As the teacher reads the story and mentions the name of one of the characters, the student (or groups of students) will stand-up, turn around and then sit down again. When “Fidget Family” is mentioned, everyone stands up and turns around and then sits down again.

CHARACTERS:

- Pa Fidget
- Grandpa Fidget
- Ma Fidget
- Maggie Fidget
- Twins
- Baby Fidget
- Grandma Fidget
- Bridget Fidget
- Johnnie Fidget
- Old Molly Fidget
- Sammy Fidget
- Old Dolly

Once upon a time there was a family with the name of the Fidget Family. There was Pa Fidget, Ma Fidget, Johnnie Fidget, Maggie Fidget, Bridget Fidget, Sammy Fidget, the Fidget Twins and Baby Fidget. One day Pa Fidget said to Ma Fidget, “Suppose we hitch Old Molly and Old Dolly to the wagon and spend the day at Grandpa Fidget and Grandma Fidget’s.”

Ma Fidget said alright, she would get Johnnie Fidget and Sammy Fidget and Maggie Fidget and Bridget Fidget and Fidget Twins and Baby Fidget all ready while Pa Fidget hitched Old Molly and Old Dolly to the wagon, so all could go to Grandma Fidget and Grandpa Fidget’s house. So, Pa Fidget drove the wagon with Old Molly and Old Dolly around the front of the house, and Johnnie Fidget and Sammy Fidget and Maggie Fidget and Bridget Fidget and the Fidget Twins all ran out to the wagon and got in. Then Ma Fidget came out with Baby Fidget and go into the wagon. Pa Fidget started Old Dolly and Old Molly and they soon were going so fast that the Fidget Twins fell out and Maggie Fidget and Bridget Fidget screamed and Ma Fidget and Pa Fidget yelled and Baby Fidget cried and Pa Fidget stopped Old Dolly and Old Molly and sent Sammy Fidget and Johnnie Fidget back to get the Fidget Twins.

Sammy Fidget and Johnnie Fidget made the Fidget Twins run and get into the wagon. So Pa Fidget starts Old Dolly and Old Molly again and they were again on their way to Grandma Fidget and Grandpa Fidget’s. When they got there, Sammy Fidget and Johnnie Fidget and Maggie Fidget and Bridget Fidget and the Fidget Twins all jumped out of the wagon and Ma Fidget and Baby Fidget got out and there were Grandpa Fidget and Grandma Fidget to greet them. Grandpa Fidget helped Pa Fidget unhitch Old Dolly and Old Molly from the wagon. Ma Fidget went with Grandma Fidget up the walk with Baby Fidget, and Fidget Twins all ran to play at Grandpa Fidget’s house. Grandma Fidget had dinner ready. A wonderful, perfect day was enjoyed by the whole Fidget Family.