



Counselor's Corner

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Increasing Social and Academic Competence through Whole Body Listening

Across home and school settings, we often expect children to learn how to focus, listen, and follow directions instinctively, using a “built in” social sense we assume all children possess. However, not all children acquire social skills and self-regulation intuitively. Dr. Ross Greene, clinical psychologist and author, explains that parents and teachers can help children flourish by looking through a different lens and asking “Does the child *have* the skills needed to perform the task?” Greene believes, “Kids do well if they can.”

Many children, especially those with social learning, sensory processing, or attention challenges may not have the skills needed to understand that “listening” is more than a function of just hearing with your ears. It involves the brain and body, along with a host of social cognitive and sensory processing skills that may need to be concretely taught for this concept to make sense. In order to reduce frustration when asking children to listen and execute a direction, it is helpful to provide strategies such as “Whole Body Listening” and creating a future image of what the end goal should look like.

“Whole Body Listening” is a key component of Michelle Garcia Winner’s “Social Thinking” Curriculum, which is often used to teach the fundamentals of how and *why* we listen to others, both one-on-one and in a group setting. By breaking down the abstract concept of ‘listening’ into concrete parts, children of all ages are able to understand what is involved in this complex skill and have a better chance of success in this area.

The whole body needs to be focused on others in order to listen and demonstrate you are listening. Individual parts of the body all have a role in the “Whole Body Listening” process:

- Ears = both ears ready to hear what is being said
- Eyes = look at the person talking
- Mouth = remains quiet
- Hands = quiet in lap, pockets, or by your side
- Feet = quiet on the floor
- Body = faces the speaker
- Brain = thinking about what is being said
- Heart = caring about what the other person is saying

Listening skills are foundational executive and self-regulation skills for children to possess, in order to be successful in both academics and social situations. If students are able to attend and listen, they are more available to absorb academic and social content and be successful in managing tasks and social situations. “Whole Body Listening” is a concept to support this fundamental skill, as well as a powerful means to increase their executive function skills. Please practice and reinforce this important concept at home to further develop your child’s social and academic competence.

*Adapted from “*Think Social!*” by Michelle Garcia Winner

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