

## COVID-19: Speech and Language Therapy at Home

During this COVID-19 pandemic, we know that many therapy services have been postponed for toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children with Down syndrome.

[Diana Brenner-Miller](#), one of the pediatric speech and language pathologists in our MassGeneral Hospital Down Syndrome Program, has put together some helpful tips for caregivers trying to manage from home. We also want to say: we know that it is hard for caregivers to juggle so many roles during this stressful time. So, take these tips in bite-size pieces and give yourself a deserved break if you cannot get to all of these.



### School-Age

#### Five Playful Ways to Work on Listening and Following Directions

Adapted from: [www.playingwithwords365.com](http://www.playingwithwords365.com)

##### 1. Simon Says

This game is all about having to listen and follow directions. But for kids who might already struggle with this skill, there are a few to make this game fun and motivating for your child:

- Only give directions your child can understand. Start *simple*. Jump. Turn around. Blink your eyes. Once he can follow simple one step directives, start to make them a little harder with two items of information like *jump two times* or *turn around three times*. You can then add three part directives like *Jump three times then turn around*. And so on. If your child is struggling, step back a step.
- When starting out you may want to give the directions and then show him what you want him to do. For example, tell him “Jump” and then physically jump. This will give him a visual. This is helpful as you start increase the complexity of the directions.

##### 2. Red Light, Green Light

Another classic game, this is a great game to work on following directions. Here are some tips for using this game to work on your child’s listening skills:

- Once your child gets the hang of the concepts of green-means-go and red-means-stop, add in another color “light” to the mix: Yellow Light for crawling, Orange light for turning around, Blue light for clapping...
- A tip to help him understand the directions at first: Make signs with the colors you will use in the game with pictures of the motor movements on them. So if you did purple-is-hop-like-a-bunny you can make a round purple “light” and put a picture of a bunny on it as a visual reminder. Then slowly take the signs away and have your child play JUST by listening.

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#### 3. I Spy

One person finds an object within view and begins to describe it one attribute at a time. "I spy something blue. I spy something with four wheels. I spy something that goes vroom vroom!" The other players must listen to all the attributes and figure out what the item is. This game can even be done items not in view (like a backwards 20 Questions) but I would not recommend this with young children or any child that has difficulties with listening comprehension. Here are my tips for using I Spy with your child:

- Start SIMPLE. To teach the game, you may want to take three items and place them in front of you and your child to play the first few times, to help your child grasp the game and give him a smaller playing field, if you will. In fact you may need to play this way for a while depending on your child's age and ability level. Eventually you can play in a small room, outside, in the car, etc.
- To help your little one stay organized and remember the information he is being given, write down each attribute after you say it (even when it is HIS turn, write it down also). Then go back and review the attributes each time with him (do the same when it is your turn to guess so he is continually hearing the attributes over and over).

#### 4. Obstacle Courses

- Start simple. Set up maybe only a 3-5 part course at first and then increase it as your child's skills develop.
- To target listening, you can do two things. First, you can give him directions on exactly how to go through the obstacle course. This works best if at least a couple different steps can be manipulated differently. For example, one step could be a small table. But does he go under, over, or around the table? He will have to listen to find out! You could set up a station with blocks and tell him he needs to build a 5 block tower. Maybe a step with a hoola hoop that he could either jump in or actually try to hoola. Make sense?
- Another way to incorporate listening is to have one step of the course be just that: following directions before he can go on. It can be like a "Simon says" step where he has to follow whatever directions you give, and then he can keep going.

#### 5. Follow the Leader

This is a visual game isn't it? How can this work on *listening*? Well...yes this is more of a visual following-directions-game. However, for little ones who are *really struggling* with listening this kind of game might be where you want to start. Even though we often talk about areas of development separately...speech development, gross motor development, cognitive development...they are all intertwined and work together. Therefore, one of the first things we might target is actually *gross motor imitation*. Yes...even in speech therapy. Why? Because this is an important cognitive skill that helps to lay the foundation for communication.