



Attending During Large Group Events

Learning to sit, listen, and follow rules in large group settings such as assemblies, places of worship, or movies can be challenging for children. Some events such as places of worship provide frequent opportunities for practice while others may occur every few months. Regardless of how often a child attends a large group event, learning skills for these settings is important for participating in fun school and community activities.

1. Set Clear Expectations: Before the event, provide children with a short list of expectations with pictures or written cues. Examples of common expectations are sit, eyes on speaker, and quiet mouth. Depending on the activity additional expectations could include sing with the group, clap when other people clap, or raise hand to ask a question. Use a calendar to show when the activity is happening and discuss the expectations every day for a few days preceding the event. Some children also will benefit from a printed copy of the expectations during the event.

2. Video Self-Modeling: Have children practice the expectations and videotape them correctly demonstrating skills. Edit the video to show only correct behaviors and point them out using voiceovers and, if appropriate, text. For example, go to the auditorium and have the child enter, sit, pretend they are watching a presentation, and walk out. Edit the video and focus on one behavior at a time such as a voiceover saying, 'I keep my hands to myself' while the video shows the child with their hands in their lap. Have the child watch it a few times before each assembly. Using videos of other children correctly showing skills is also a way to use video, but many children love seeing themselves as the 'stars' and are reinforced by images of themselves.

3. Practice before an Event: Practice the steps of going to, attending, and leaving an event before the event. This can be done at the actual venue or at home or school. For example, if a child has a difficult time at a place of worship, practice getting dressed, going to the location, walking in, sitting down, listening, and leaving when it is not in use so children can learn the basic principles without crowds of people.

4. Plan Based on the Child: Think about timing and seating when planning the activity. Will the child be more successful if they are closer to the front of the assembly so they can see and hear well or will they do better near the back? Will they be more successful if they have time to get settled or will the child have too much downtime and arriving just before the activity begins be better? These simple things can make a big difference for a child.

5. Be Realistic: Sometimes events are simply too loud, slow paced, or long for some children. Choose activities of interest or attend only part of an activity then gradually add time so the event is successful. When children, families, or professionals have realistic goals and build on them, events are more pleasant for everyone.

6. Reinforce Good Behavior: Provide positive reinforcement during the activity for children attending and following rules. Use what is truly motivating for a child and reward them for a job well done. Let children know in advance what they will receive and provide reinforcement frequently enough so children stay motivated.