

## Understanding language - Parent/Carer Advice Sheet

Most children learn to understand language naturally. But some children need help to learn the meaning of spoken words.

Children can have specific difficulties with their understanding of language (Receptive skills) or it can be linked to other difficulties such as listening skills or behavioural difficulties.

Children with difficulties with their language skills often don't let us know when they haven't understood, which leaves them reliant on an adult to notice and explain. This could be because:

- They don't know **how** to ask
- They don't have the **confidence** to ask
- They don't know **who** to ask
- They don't know **when** to ask

### Strategies to aid children's understanding at home

- Teach your child specific phrases they can use, e.g. say to the child "If you don't understand you can say 'what does that mean?'"
- Praise your child for asking. Use specific responses such as "Good asking" or for older children "I'm glad you asked me what that word meant"
- Promote a culture of it being good to ask questions at home, e.g. question time games
- Encourage your child to ask friends or family members when they don't understand
- Use **simple and familiar language** to get your message across
- Break down lengthy instructions into **shorter, more manageable chunks** and allow your child time to process
- Emphasise and **repeat 'key' vocabulary**
- Link 'new' vocabulary with words familiar to your child, e.g. A calf is a baby cow which is an animal.
- Reinforce information and instructions with **visual support**, e.g. with the use of gesture, symbols, pictures, objects and written words.
- Use **checking questions** to ensure the child has understood e.g. 'what are you going to do first?' 'and then what do you need to do?'. Alternatively, ask your child to tell you what you said in his/her own words.
- Encourage children to **use their own strategies** to aid their understanding, e.g. by repeating what they have heard, using silent rehearsal of the instruction and identifying the 'key' parts of the instruction.
- Word order is important for young children, or older children with significant understanding difficulties, e.g. 'get your P.E. kit before you go to the hall' is easier to follow as the instructions are in sequence, compared to: 'before you go to the hall get your P.E kit'.
- 'Wh' questions (who, where, when, what, why) are often difficult for children with understanding difficulties and may need to be rephrased, e.g. "who" can become "which person".

### Specific Activities (Parent and Child/in a Group)

- Dressing up game. (Lay out a variety of clothes in front of the child/children. Instruct each child in turn to put on a specific item of clothing, e.g. "John, put on the slippers and the scarf". Extend the activity by including clothes of different colour and size e.g. "John put on the big, green gloves".
- Simon says. (During this activity you can incorporate a number of different actions/concepts/prepositions, e.g. "Simon says stand **in front** of your chair" or "Simon says **skip** to the **tallest** tree"

### Useful websites and resources

Talking Point: [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)