

Developing Understanding of Language



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What is Receptive Language?

Language involves the ability to understand and communicate with others. Receptive language is the understanding of words, sentences, gestures, writing or other communication methods.

Receptive Language Difficulties

You may see the following in a child who has difficulties understanding language:

- Difficulties understanding abstract and academic language required for learning. An example of abstract language might be the word 'tomorrow'.
- Difficulties making progress at school.
- Difficulties assimilating the information, drawing inferences from information, or using the information to solve problems.
- Difficulties in learning through reading, as what is read may not be understood.
- Difficulties socialising with peers.

A child who presents with any one or more of the above, may try to disguise their difficulties by

- Watching and/or copying others
- Avoiding tasks by opting out, being disruptive or using delaying tactics.

Why is it important to identify receptive language difficulties?

- Children who have difficulties understanding language might become frustrated due their limited ability to understand what is being asked of them – this might be interpreted as the child having a behaviour issue when there may be an underlying language problem.
- Children who have difficulties understanding language can become withdrawn.
- Children with communication difficulties often identify themselves as less able than their friends, affecting their self-esteem.
- Poor language development often results in poor literacy development.
- Communication needs in primary school children can have a large impact on learning. Only a fifth of children with language difficulties achieve the expected levels for their age in English and Maths at age 11.



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Strategies to Support Understanding of Language



Ensure that the **child is attending to you** before speaking to them.

If a child does not understand, try to think about the language you used and consider changing the length, structure and/or vocabulary to **make it simpler**.

Understanding group directions and coping with the distractions of class situations can pose difficulties for some children with language problems. When a child is working in large groups or in a classroom, **1:1 opportunities should be available** to revise and reinforce information given to ensure that the child has understood.

Try a **multi-sensory approach** – encourage the child to use auditory, visual and kinaesthetic (hearing, seeing, doing) routes to learning in order to understand, remember and recall information.

If there is a sequence of instructions to follow, pause between each one to **allow the child to process the information**.

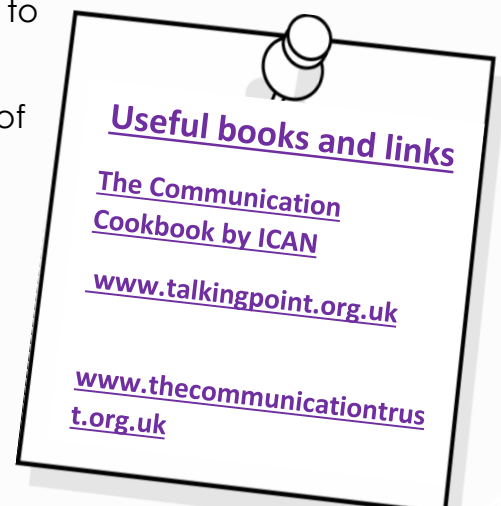
Encourage the child to **use strategies to process information** such as asking them to;

- repeat what they have been asked to do.
- silently rehearse the instruction in their head.
- identify the important words in the instruction.

Encourage the child to tell you when they do not understand.

Use appropriate **non-verbal communication** to support what you are saying to the child.

Avoid sarcasm and metaphors as these styles of communication can be difficult to understand.





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Activities to Develop Understanding of Language at Home

Make it visual: try using a [visual timetable](#)/timelines using photographs/pictures of people/items that represent the child's daily routine.

Simon says: a child is selected to follow the parent's instructions. The parent then gives an instruction for example 'Simon says look up at the ceiling then clap your hands'. If the child follows the direction correctly, they can then give the next instruction. Try varying the complexity of the instruction depending on your child's ability.

Drawing pictures: give a series of simple instructions for your child to draw. For example:

- 'Draw a big square in the middle of your paper.'
- 'Add three windows.'
- 'Add a blue door.'

This can be used to develop a child's understanding on a variety of concepts e.g. colour, number, position, size. If the child does not understand your instruction, demonstrate it on your piece of paper.

Barrier games: This game is similar to the one above, but you work as a pair with your child with a screen between you. Have a picture or model and give instructions for your child to follow to create the same picture or model. Once complete the screen is drawn back and the two creations are compared.

Shopping: Put packages and food items on a table and write labels above the items. Request that the child buys items from the shop. If the child has difficulty remembering the items, consider using shopping lists; make strips of card with pictures or words depending on your child's ability. The child can then check their list of shopping to aid their memory.

Stepping Stones: Use large pictures as stepping stones and place them on the floor (These could be cut out of a magazine). Explain that there is a river and that the child needs to step on the correct stepping stone to get across. Tell them the name of picture, using directional cues if required for example 'the one in front of', 'the one next to', 'the one behind'. If they get it wrong, they fall into the river and they are out! The named pictures should not be in a straight line because this is too predictable. Use an unpredictable pattern so that the child is relying on their understanding of language to get them across the river.