

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Children with high-level comprehension difficulties may have problems:

- ◆ following classroom instructions, especially those involving order e.g. "Before you go out to play, clear away your table and put away your books" or an indirect request – e.g. "It's very hot in here with the door closed"
- ◆ 'why?' questions
- ◆ Going off on a tangent and giving inappropriate answers, they may appear to have social communication skill difficulties and not make friends easily.
- ◆ taking times to acquire new vocabulary, especially when different words are used to mean the same e.g. multiply/times
- ◆ need much longer to process instructions and think about their answers
- ◆ May have dysfluent language in their responses to questions at this level. They have struggled to process the information, then have needed to organise and sequence what they need to say.
- ◆ Have a poor storage system for new vocabulary. They may make errors in meaning because they have retrieved the incorrect word.
- ◆ Have many strategies to avoid situations where they need to demonstrate these skills.
- ◆ They may have good sight vocabulary, but have difficulties with reading comprehension and interpreting meaning in text.

Specific Lesson Difficulties

English

- ◆ May struggle with creative writing due to poor imaginative thinking. Struggle to predict what will happen next.
- ◆ story telling/writing – Limited awareness of beginning/middle, end
- ◆ may read well but have poor comprehension of what was read
- ◆ spelling difficulties recalling and producing letter and word strings in the correct sequence

Maths

- ◆ may struggle with mathematical concepts, e.g. money/time concepts 'before/after'/'bigger than'/'divide by'
- ◆ difficulties with logical thought processes and making deductions
- ◆ difficulties ordering numbers
- ◆ limited awareness of spatial orientation and direction

Science/technology

- ◆ difficulties predicting outcomes and hypothesising
- ◆ may struggle with the order needed to conduct experiments
- ◆ not always open to a range of possible solutions/little flexibility in developing ideas

History

- ◆ reduced understanding of time sequences e.g. recent and distant past

Modern Foreign Language

- ◆ Difficulty understanding and acquiring the language, due to underlying memory, storage and processing difficulties in their first language.

HOW TO HELP

Children with high-level language difficulties may be provided with specific programmes of work by their speech and language therapist on developing these skills.

The following general principles may be useful for the classroom setting:

- ◆ Teach a child to recognise and ask for help when he does not understand
- ◆ Monitor and adapt your own language
- ◆ Repeat key words/phrases
- ◆ Intersperse a child's need to listen and understand with practical activities
- ◆ Simplify and re-word sentences
- ◆ Keep the order of the instruction the same as the order of the action required e.g. instead of "Before you have your dinner, wash your hands, after you've tidied up" say "Tidy up, wash your hands then go and have your dinner".
- ◆ Work specifically on the new vocabulary required within topics/curriculum areas
- ◆ Use gesture/demonstration
- ◆ Check the child's attention is focused before giving instructions
- ◆ Give additional explanation of complex or ambiguous language used
- ◆ Use more literal language and be alert to the use of idioms – e.g.. "cut it out", "I was just pulling your leg", "Help James out, Matthew"
- ◆ Clearly mark a change of topic
- ◆ Minimise the abstract and focus on the concrete
- ◆ Make rules and expectations logical, ordered and explicit.

With this support, children often learn how to use high level language skills however they will need more time and encouragement to generalise these skills into everyday conversation in both school, home and social settings.

GENERALISATION

In everyday situations ask questions to enable the child to use the skills e.g.

Reasoning

In school: When doing a task ask 'why' something is being done in a particular way e.g. during any story or circle time discussion, ask why something has happened in that and also how it could have happened. Make sure you ask many children so the child with difficulties has many models of language to use.

At home: When doing the shopping ask why, how and 'what would you do if' questions e.g. what should we do if they don't have baked beans? How do they clean these lights in the supermarket? Why do they have a cash machine outside the shop?

Socially: When in the park or at others' houses ask the child 'why' questions e.g. Why is that girl crying over there? Why do you like the slide best of all?, Why did you not like going to David's house?, How do you get to Sarah's house from here?

Categorisation

In school: When doing curriculum activities ask the child to think of an alternative item/word that could be used, e.g. when talking about the weather ask the child is it hot or cold? Then when they say correctly 'hot' ask for another word to describe the weather e.g. sunny, warm, bright'.

At home: When doing tasks ask the child to think of other words that are linked e.g. in the kitchen ask the child to get some milk from the fridge, then ask the child what other things you could find in the fridge.

During trips to the supermarket, ask the child to think of all the categories that can be found with all your shopping items, e.g.

Soap = 'cleaning'

Apples = 'fruit'

Potatoes = 'vegetables'

Lemonade = 'fizzy drinks' etc.

Socially: When out-and-about play word-association games, e.g. one person names an item and the next person has to name something that is connected with this item, keep going until someone can't think of a related word e.g. cat – dog – bone – skeleton – body – clothes. You can play odd one out games, e.g. say 4 things (3 in the same category, 1 in a different category) can the child find the one that's not the same?

Complex sequencing

In school: During activities ask the child to explain the succession of events e.g. morning timetable: first it is assembly – then circle time – next is maths – then break – followed by art – and then it is lunch; throughout the day check with the child what they did before this activity and what is next. Use a visual timetable to help develop this skill initially.

At home: During daily activities get the child to explain the order of how to do things to you e.g. getting dressed – put your underwear on – put your top and pants on – put your jumper on – put your socks and shoes on – then put your coat on. You can play games or colour pictures to develop these skills.

Socially: When going to places ask the child to tell you what will happen e.g. going to the swimming baths – go in the car to the baths – pay to go swimming – get changed – then go into the pool. You can develop these skills by getting the child to draw the story and talk about them before and after the event has happened. This is especially useful if there is a new event about to take place. It will prepare the child and reduce anxiety.

Prediction

In school: Any activity can involve the asking of 'What do you think will happen next?' questions, e.g. stories, discussions at circle time, videos (stopping the video first), games in groups. Ask many children for their opinion, so the child with difficulties can have many examples. Also ask why they think this will happen, how it is going to happen and what else could happen. Developing the concept of "what if...." Is very important at this level of language development.

At home / socially: use any situations that will allow the child to 'guess' what will happen next, e.g. what do you think Dad will want for tea? What time do you think Simon will get home? When do you think it will rain? Again, develop the, 'what else' concept, e.g. if that didn't happen what else could?

Inferencing

In school: this level of skill can be built into curriculum areas, it is a bit more complex, abstract and detailed thinking than prediction skills, it involves high level cause – effect analysis. The level of language needs to be more abstract and involving other kinds of analysis, e.g. visual. Get the children to look through the pictures in storybooks and infer how people are feeling and why, explaining what will happen in the story, why and how they know this.

At home / socially: Again, using real-life situations or stories, ask the child to guess what will happen and also to explain their answer, e.g. "I know that because she looks cold and angry and the man is waiting at the bus stop" – they need to take the whole situation into account.

For further information please contact your speech & language therapist