

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Echolalia (chunked sentences)

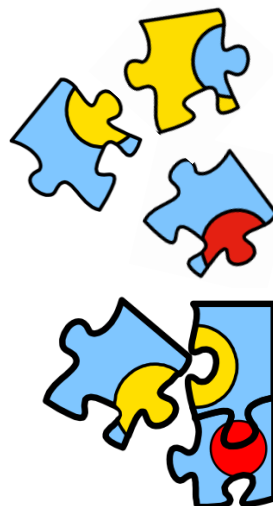
Learning Language in Different Ways

People learn to talk in more than one way:

- Sometimes we put words together to make sentences, e.g. "big cat running!", "mummy home!" "I'm going on holiday tomorrow".
- Sometimes people copy **chunks** of language from other people, e.g. "uh-oh!", "All-fall-down!". We memorise these sentences which make them quick to use.

It's a bit like putting a jigsaw together:

- Sometimes you join pieces together one at a time. This is similar to putting single words together into a sentence.
- At other times, we might have *whole chunks* of the jigsaw that have already been put together. We do the same thing when we talk using short sentences, e.g. "Hang on!".



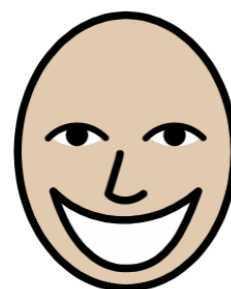
What if my child *only* learns language in 'chunks'?

- For some children, building sentences is hard, but they might be good at copying chunks of language. Some children remember these 'chunks' because they are linked to a situation and use them later to get across a message. For example, "To infinity and beyond!" might be used to mean "I want you to put Toy Story on". Children who learn language in this way often learn the tune of the phrases they pick up, as well as the words.
- This 'chunk' of copied language, where you can't always work out the meaning from the words themselves is called **echolalia**. Copying chunks of words and using them on purpose, in a different situation, is called **delayed echolalia**.
- You might have heard of children who use echolalia to be described as **gestalt language learners**. This is **not** a diagnosis. It is a **description** that some people use to explain how your child talks.

How can I help my child if they use echolalia?

Smile and respond

A positive reaction will help them want to communicate even more! Show them you have listened, even if you are not sure what they are communicating. You can do this by saying “yeah”, “okay”, or by copying the sentence back. For any child, it’s important to encourage all attempts to communicate.



Keep a list

Write down the language chunks your child uses a lot. Think about:

- ◇ What were they doing when they said it?
- ◇ What do you think they meant?



Having this information means you can tell others what your child is trying to say (e.g. childminders, nursery staff and teachers). They can add what they notice too!

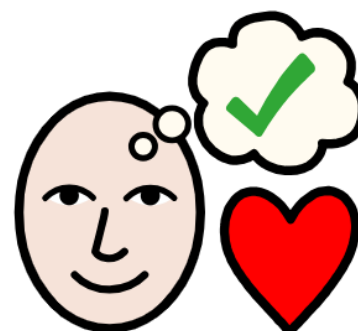
Give examples of useful sentences

Think about reasons why your child communicates which could include asking for something, protesting, refusing or to ask for help. Think of useful short sentences and show them how to use them. For example, if your child pushes a toy away to refuse it, you could say, “I don’t want that” in a sing-song voice, so it is interesting and easy to copy.



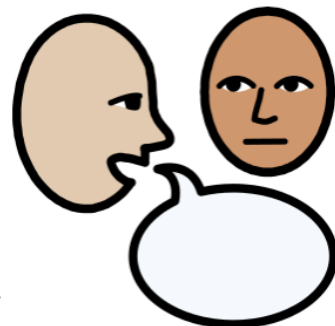
Interests and motivators

Use sentences that are linked to your child’s interests, so that they are motivating. Include sentences from their favourite TV shows or songs e.g. “Let’s go on an adventure!” from Peppa Pig. Think about what your child may want to tell us, not what we want them to say.



My child uses lots of chunked sentences already, what next?

- When your child is ready, they might start to use their chunked sentences in new ways. For example, your child might say “Time to eat pizza!” whenever they want to start a new activity, even if it is nothing to do with pizza. Encourage this by modelling different versions and link it to what you are going to do, for example, “Time to play!” “Time to go outside!”. They might start to copy.



- You could teach useful sentence starters by showing your child how to use them. Use flexible words at the start so that you can add other words afterwards.

You could try using these flexible words in different sentences:

Flexible word examples are : ‘let’s’, ‘it’s’, ‘we’re’.

Let’s → “**Let’s** go and play!” “**Let’s** eat” “**Let’s** have some fun!”

It’s → “**It’s** so fun!” “**It’s** tasty” “**It’s** time to brush our teeth”

We’re → “**We’re** going outside” “**We’re** home!”

- Make sure your child has plenty of opportunities to hear language.
- Play, read stories, act out favourite stories, talk about what your child is doing as though you are telling a story about them. Wait and see what words they start to use!