

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Supporting Early Language Development

Some children struggle to use language and use single words or less; are unable to concentrate on a task or even play for very long; and struggle to follow instructions. They may need an alternative way to help them understand and communicate, such as signs and symbols, objects, pictures, photos.

Children at this level will struggle to access the curriculum and will need many of their targets set around language development. They will need language they hear to match the context i.e. the child needs to see what you are talking about. They will also need to build a basic vocabulary of words before they can put words together to make simple sentences.

These are the strategies that are helpful for early years children or those who are older, but have significant difficulties with learning, language and possibly other aspects of their development.

Strategies to support Early Language Development -

- **Get down to the child's level.** This will help them attend to your language. Let them see your face.
- **Follow the child's lead.** This gives a strong signal that you are interested in what they are doing. It will help them focus on your language and sustain concentration. Allow the child to choose toys, join in by copying their play then model by playing alongside the child.
- **Don't anticipate their needs** even though they may not be able to say much - always gives choices, allowing the child to point.
- **Avoid asking** too many questions. Instead -
 - Follow the child's lead
 - Talk about what the child is doing.
 - Keep sentences short and simple
 - Provide a running commentary to use and teach vocabulary, grammar and organisation of language. Make your voice interesting to help keep the child's attention.
- **Repeat** new words many times in many different situations
- **Point to real objects** at the same time as saying the word, where possible, to make sure the child understands the meaning of the word.
- **Allow the child to say and practice** the new word (not just hear the adult say it). This will help them remember it.
- **Use different senses** to encourage the child to learn the word e.g. give opportunities for the child to; use, feel, draw, look at and explore the object they are learning about.