

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

# Supporting Narrative Skills

Narrative is a word we use for storytelling. We use storytelling in our everyday lives to interact, explain, describe, and make sense of our lives. Children are exposed to stories daily through stories, TV, magazines, computer games, friends and family.

Stories have a structure and are organised into a sequence. This is usually a beginning, middle and end. There is usually a plot, a setting including a location, characters, a main event or conflict and a resolution.

Story telling is very difficult for children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication Needs. It places huge demands on their listening and attention skills, their ability to retain and recall information, understanding of language, their ability to formulate language using the correct words and correct grammar. It requires sequencing ability and understanding of time and causality as well as understanding of social interactions and the thoughts and feelings of others.

Difficulties producing a narrative and sequencing language in the correct order can result in difficulties describing social scenarios e.g. incidents at break and lunch times. This may result in the child or young person getting into trouble or taking the blame as a result of their difficulties relaying the order of events.

In order for children and young people to develop their narrative/story telling ability it is essential to focus on the development of their:

- Attention & Listening skills
- Vocabulary
- Sequencing skills

### Strategies to help younger pupils with sequencing:

- Using everyday activities and talking about the sequence in which things happen e.g. getting ready for PE, making a sandcastle, cooking etc.
- Adults using simple instructions using clear language e.g. "First close your book, then line up at the door"

- Allowing the child give a sequence of instructions to others in a real context support by modelling the language of sequence e.g. 'first , then , next' etc.
- Talking about every day activities and drawing out the sequence of these e.g. cleaning teeth, getting dressed, making toast etc. Encourage the child to order sequence pictures in the correct order. Talk about what happens 'first', 'then', 'next'.
- Use a visual timetable to talk through the sequence of the day's events. Talk about what is happening at the start of the day, what happens in the middle of the day and what is going to happen at the end of the day.

#### General strategies to help develop a child's narrative skills:

- Carry out active listening games. For instance tell a story and then re-tell it changing key characters and facts. Encourage the children to say if they notice the differences and talk about what changes in the story.
- When reading class texts/stories highlight key vocabulary and reinforce this whenever possible. Frequently re-cap characters names and locations.
- Use pictures books and class stories/texts to look at the structure of a story. Talk about what is happening at the beginning, what happens in the middle and how it ends.

#### A simple story has these features:

- The beginning i.e. the 'who', 'where', 'when' and 'what'. This is the initiating event or the problem to be solved .
- The middle i.e. the actions to achieve the goal.
- The end i.e the overall outcome.

#### Next steps to support narrative development:

- Encourage the child to link sentences together appropriately using the correct pronouns and joining words e.g. 'Tom rode his bike along the path. It had wobbly wheels'.
- Encourage comments about how characters feel, think and explanations about the causes and consequences of events in the story.
- Change the story ending and talk about what happens. Link ending to emotions vocabulary and encourage the child to generate different endings for well-known stories.
- Change other aspects of the story such as characters, setting or time.
- Children may then be ready to make up their own stories.