

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

# Supporting a Child's Spoken Language

Some children struggle with their spoken language. These children may -

- Only use short phrases.
- Make occasional errors with grammar such as past tenses e.g. 'I goed' instead of 'I went'.
- Use simple empty language such as 'thingy' or 'doing that'.
- May struggle to relate an event in order and include key details .

**To develop effective expressive language there needs to be -**

- A rich vocabulary, with the knowledge of when and how to use the right words.
- An appropriate use of grammar, knowing how to combine words to make sentences using the right words, in the right order, with the right grammatical markers, for example tenses, plurals etc.
- An ability to put sequences of language together, for explanations, conversations, storytelling, etc.
- An ability to use language appropriately for different purposes and contexts

It's important adults consider how they communicate with children. This can affect -

- A child's understanding
- The child's expressive language development
- The number of opportunities for the child to talk
- The motivation for the child to talk

These are all things which affect children's learning and behaviour.

The following strategies support and encourage expressive language -

- **Accepting:** Avoid correcting a child - they need to know you are listening to **what** they are saying **not how** they are saying it. **Don't** say : 'no ...say this.....'
- **Repetition:** Repeat back what the child has said to you - repetition tells the child that you are listening and interested. Repetition also checks that you have understood the message the child would like to put across.
- **Simplifying:** Be aware of children's language levels. Match your language to the levels of understanding of the child. A child using simple phrases like this will need you to use much shorter sentences.
- **Modelling:** This encourages a child to use longer sentences. Repeat the child's utterances (or part of) using the correct grammar, vocabulary or speech sounds. e.g. 'They was going shop' - respond with 'They **were** going to the shop'
- **Expanding:** Use sentences which are slightly longer than the child's e.g. if the child says 'car' the adult might say 'red car' or 'big car'. Avoid adding too much information which will overload the child. 1 or 2 words or concepts are generally sufficient.
- **Pausing:** Give the child time to think and formulate an answer. Wait for a response. It may be for longer than feels comfortable (count to 10). Avoid talking constantly when a child is not very verbal, as this reduces talking opportunities for the child.
- **Running commentary:** Follow the child's lead. Talk about what the child is doing. Keep sentences short. Commenting on what is happening during an activity provides opportunities to use and teach vocabulary, grammar and organisation of language.
- **Questioning:** Avoid asking too many questions. Match questions to the child's understanding - 'what', 'where' and 'who' are easier than 'when', 'how' and 'why'. Closed questions are easier to answer, i.e. those that only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer or those that give a straight choice e.g. 'do you want milk or juice?' Open questions encourage more expressive language. e.g. 'What did you see at the zoo?' rather than 'Did you see an elephant?' Pause after asking a question to allow the child to formulate an answer.
- **Praising:** Praise all attempts at talking specifically e.g. 'Good talking' 'You used a good sentence'
- **Give choices** (forced alternatives): "Do you want a banana or an apple?"