

## Speech, language and communication needs

### Asking for help!

If you are at all concerned about a child's speech, language or communication needs, seek advice from a therapist and as soon as possible! Most parents naturally adapt to their child's needs. Therefore, it's likely they've developed effective strategies to support.

### Masking needs

Some children develop subtle and effective strategies to compensate for their language difficulties, and they can mask these difficulties too. It's not always something they're aware of doing. **For example:**

- Changing the subject to one they understand
- Facial expression/gestures/body language can give a false impression of understanding
- Repeating back exactly what has been said when asked to explain what they need to do
- Using complex vocabulary which they're not able to demonstrate a good understanding of
- Using phrases in context but unable to use the vocabulary in other, functional ways
- Using distraction through behaviour or speech, but this isn't always 'obvious' and can include distracting others by making them laugh

### Simplify the language you use

Adapting the language we use isn't easy, but unless we do, some children simply won't understand what is being said.

- Avoid asking questions with multiple parts
- Avoid adding complex or abstract concepts or difficult, 'high-level' vocabulary
- Be aware of using language which requires skills they might struggle with. For example, **inferencing, prediction, reflection, justification**

### Working with individual needs

- Does the child find eye contact difficult?
- Would they feel more comfortable if you sat next to them rather than talk face to face?
- How well can they respond when asked questions in front of others?

### Pauses

Sometimes, pauses in conversation can feel a bit uncomfortable, but, some children might require up to 10 -15 seconds to process what you have said and be ready to respond.

### Visuals...

- visuals support understanding of language
- visuals reduce a need for eye contact
- visuals can improve focus on a task
- visuals can support the retention of learning

But you don't need a visual to represent everything that you say. You could try drawing simple images or symbols to represent any important, key or tricky vocabulary.

### Filling in the gaps

When people speak, we naturally seek and interpret any hidden meaning and intent. If a sentence doesn't make sense, or if keywords are missing this natural 'seeking' might automatically fill in the missing gaps, guessing the meaning.

Try to be aware of this and avoid applying meaning or intent to children's responses, particularly when the child is a literal thinker. You could try asking for more information, to reword the sentence, or encourage them to use gesture to help you to understand.