

Section 5: advice sheet

the school years toolkit

hope making a difference choice understanding friendly
quality understanding dedication hope enthusiastic specialist compassion
equality care choice independence respect community trust together quality
hope enthusiastic specialist compassion safe health service local dependable help equality care

Verbal comprehension (understanding language)

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet for strategies to help children who have difficulties with understanding spoken language.

If you have used this Advice Sheet and not seen improvement after three to four months, please contact CYPIT.

Definition

Terms often used to describe comprehension:

- Verbal comprehension
- Receptive language
- Understanding of spoken language
- Language processing
- Auditory processing.

The ability to understand language involves the following skills:

- Listening
- Remembering information (auditory memory)
- Understanding vocabulary and concepts
- Understanding the importance of word order in a sentence (grammar).

What you may see

In the classroom environment, the child may:

- Look blank when spoken to
- Have poor listening skills
- Not respond to the speaker or echo back what has been heard
- Give inappropriate responses to questions, instructions and in conversations
- Take their cue as to what to do by observing other children around them
- Seek a lot of reassurance from adults
- Be hesitant to start a task following spoken or written instructions
- Read mechanically with little understanding
- Exhibit inappropriate or "naughty" behaviour.

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Socially the child may:

- Appear isolated, bored or withdrawn
- Play alongside or copy peers
- Have difficulty making friends
- Act aggressively towards other children.

Strategies and advice

How you can help the child in school

- Make full use of visual clues to support spoken or written information. These include pictures, photos, symbols eg facial expression, gesture, diagrams and, for older children, concept maps, vocabulary boards, written texts etc.
- Gain the child's attention before giving any instruction by saying their name.
- Allow extra time for the child to understand before responding.
- Simplify your own language (KISS - Keep It Short and Simple).
- Check that the child has understood before moving on – ask the child to explain/repeat back what they have to do rather than ask them if they have understood.
- Allow the child to read texts below their optimum reading or decoding ability, to allow them to concentrate on the meaning.
- Explain non-literal/ambiguous language eg idioms, words with multiple meanings, sarcasm etc.

Targeted activities

- Teach “Good Listening” skills and active listening skills and frequently revise them. Please refer to the Auditory processing advice sheet.
- Provide work at a level that the child is able to understand.
- Reinforce key concepts.
- Pre-tutor vocabulary (teach new words before introducing a topic), using symbols and signs.
- Repeat activities in different ways to reinforce understanding.

Suggested Resources

- Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Programmes for Teaching and Supporting Pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs.
- Early Language Builders – ELKLAN, www.elklan.co.uk.
- Language Builders – ELKLAN, www.elklan.co.uk.
- Secondary Language Builders – ELKLAN, www.elklan.co.uk.
- Language Builders for post 16s – ELKLAN, www.elklan.co.uk.
- Language Steps - Amanda Armstrong STASS 44 North Rd, Ponteland, Northumberland, NE20 9UR (Tel: 01661 822 316).
- Listening Skills Collection – Colour Cards, Speechmark.
- Spoken Language Difficulties - Stuart, et al. (2002) David Fulton Publishers: London.

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- Black Sheep Press resources for speech and language – Black Sheep Press, 67 Middleton, Cowling, Keighly, W Yorks. BD22 0DQ www.blacksheepress.co.uk.
- Developing Baseline Communication Skills - Winslow Press.
- Teacher Net – an interactive resource to support head teachers, leadership teams, teachers and support staff. www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications.
- <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110202093118/http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>.