

# UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE



**PRACTICAL  
STRATEGIES TO  
HELP CHILDREN IN  
THE CLASSROOM**

Understanding of language is essential for learning. It involves remembering and understanding what is said to you including:

- individual words (vocabulary and concepts)
- the structure of the sentence (grammar)

In the classroom children with difficulties understanding language may:



- become confused when given instructions
- rely on non-verbal cues to aid their understanding e.g. they will watch/copy others in the class
- only follow part of an instruction
- appear withdrawn or disruptive in class when really they do not understand what has been said
- often repeat what has been said to them or give irrelevant/inappropriate answers to questions
- hide their difficulty by talking constantly
- have difficulty learning new vocabulary and concepts
- find it difficult to concentrate as they are not understanding all that is going on around them

## Strategies to help children in the classroom

You can help children with difficulties understanding language by:

- reducing distractions as much as possible and gaining the child's full attention before giving an instruction
- simplifying instructions or making them shorter e.g. say 'coats on' instead of 'everyone go and put your coats on'
- allowing the child time to answer questions or follow instructions
- repeating or rephrasing instructions
- using gestures and pictures as much as possible
- pausing between each part of an instruction to allow the child to process the information in smaller sections e.g. 'put your coat on, (pause)...line up (pause)...and then go outside'
- encouraging the child to ask for instructions to be repeated
- checking if the child has understood by asking 'What do you have to do now?'

# Activities to develop understanding of language

- Listening games: Play 'Simon Says' with the child e.g. 'Simon says touch your toes'. Make it more difficult by making the instructions longer e.g. 'Touch your toes and clap your hands'.
- Story time: Read a story with the child and ask them some questions e.g. What did the caterpillar eat? Where did teddy go? etc.
- Message games: Ask the child to get a list of items from around the house or classroom e.g. 'Go and get a pencil, a book and a cup'.
- Barrier games: Two children/small groups of children have matching equipment divided by a barrier. They take turns to listen to instructions so that when the barrier is removed they have identical results.