

I CAN Factsheet 1

SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS: Language Difficulties in the Early Years

This factsheet is primarily designed for staff in mainstream nurseries and other pre-school facilities who may have children with speech, language and communication needs within their groups.

It aims to provide simple and practical techniques to help children with speech, language and communication needs. The methods may benefit other children as well. They are straightforward approaches that can be made part of the day to day life of an early years setting.

Using the TALK technique: Talking together: Being equal partners in communication

How?

Listen more than you talk

It is easy when working with young children to talk most of the time; giving information, asking questions and directing. It is really important to be aware of this and allow children time to respond, helping them to practice their speech, language and communication skills. Encourage talking together by giving a child plenty of time to think about questions and information before expecting them to respond:

- Listen and watch what they are doing
- Allowing opportunities to lead the conversation with you and with their peers.
- Learn to wait for several seconds for a child to answer, and resist answering for a child when there are long pauses.

Involve children in conversation

When talking with children about what they are doing or when you are giving information or instructions, keep the language simple. Check that there is a balance in the conversation between the adult and child.

Use visual cues

Make pictures to represent activities, times of the day and places in the setting. Then staff can use these pictures as a support when communicating with a child who has speech, language and communication needs. For example, a picture of a slide can indicate outdoor play, or fruit can snack time.



Using visual cues, including pictures, objects and gestures gives children a way of asking a question, making a comment about their environment or planning what they want to do. This can really help to avoid frustration and aid understanding for the child, enhancing their communication development.

Emphasise turn taking

Demonstrate turn taking in a number of activities and in conversation. Most young children will soon respond to a turn taking pattern in play for example with jigsaws, bubbles. The adult models the phrase of “your turn, my turn” as appropriate. Start with very short waiting times between ‘turns’.

FACTSHEET 1:

Language Difficulties in the Early Years

Value what children say

Be an attentive, sensitive and interested partner in children's conversations and value what they say. This will encourage their self esteem and confidence to communicate in a range of situations.

Attention and listening: Supporting a child's understanding of language and activities

How?

Remove distractions

Ensure areas where you particularly want children to listen, attend and respond, are calming with few visual distractions. For example, in the story corner, this helps children to listen to and look at the actions and pictures and words of the story. Reduce colours of displays where possible.

Look at the child you are talking to

Children will grasp things more easily if they are looking at you. By making eye contact, you help the child to know that you are talking to them and that they need to listen to you. It will also help cue them into an activity, enhancing their understanding and enabling them to join in an activity.

Say the child's name

Say the child's name (and touch their arm gently if necessary) to help the child focus when giving instructions or asking questions. A multi-sensory approach to language works well with young children. By saying the child's name at the start of an instruction or when giving information, the child knows that you are talking to them. This helps them to realise that they need to listen to you and pay attention to what you are saying.

Keep to a routine

Sometimes there are unwritten rules in early years settings, for example, lunch follows group time. These will be particularly hard for a child with speech, language and communication needs to grasp. Using pictures when explaining routines and rules will help. If there is going to be a change to the routine, it will need to be planned in advance. The child should be warned about the change and supported through it using visual timetables, repetition and gesture to help.

Explain what is going to happen using visual timetables so the child knows what is coming next. Praise good looking, listening and attention skills. Ensure that you tell children and give them positive feedback when they show good attention and listening skills in activities.

This will help children to understand what you mean by "Listen" and they will have feedback when they are demonstrating good use of these skills.

Level of language: Adapting adult language to fit the child's level

How?

Keep language simple

Long complex sentences with difficult vocabulary can be hard for children to understand, so keep phrases short and simple with main words emphasised. New words used in a nursery setting, such as "sand", "snack time" and "home time", may be hard to understand and remember.

FACTSHEET 1:

Language Difficulties in the Early Years

Use language that would be used at home, before moving towards new vocabulary. This will help children to feel confident and maintain their interest. Gradually introduce new vocabulary using visual information to help them use and remember the new words.

For example instead of saying, “now you can play with the arts and crafts activities, after that it will be break time” you could say, “cutting and sticking, then drink.”, whilst using gestures and pointing to the relevant areas and always using visual cues or objects where possible and using a visual timetable.

Give one instruction at a time

When children’s language skills are developing, it can be very difficult for them to remember long strings of information or instructions using sequence words such as ‘before’ and ‘after’. You can really help children by giving instructions in sequence and one step at a time. E.g. “Go to the toilet”, then “wash your hands”, or “put your coat on” and later “play outside”

Check understanding

After giving an instruction, check to see if the child has understood by encouraging the child to repeat or show you, then repeat the instruction reaffirming that the child has got it right.

Keep on commenting: Reinforcing and extending a child’s language development

How?

Comment on what is happening

It is important for adults to use simple sentences and phrases as actions happen (in context). These sentences should be appropriate to the level of the child’s understanding of language. For example when playing with a farm set, talk about what the child is doing “horse is jumping”, gradually building up the level to “your horse is jumping” then “your horse is jumping over the wooden gate”.

This helps the child to learn new words and link them to build into sentences.

Give children the right language model

It is essential to always accept and value what the child has said, even if the language is limited and there are sound or grammatical errors. Always give positive feedback.

For example, when the child says “Dat my dads bu car” you could respond with “Yes, that is your Dad’s blue car!”, so that they feel they are being understood.

Repeat language

It is essential to repeat language to enable a child to learn it. Talk about what the child sees with familiar words that relate to everyday actions, activities and objects. This helps children to relate the words that they hear with their actions and experiences.

FACTSHEET 1:

Language Difficulties in the Early Years

Wait!

Ensure that you give a child plenty of time to think about questions and information given to them and answer. This may sound easy, but waiting for a child to think and respond takes practice. Learn to wait for several seconds for a child to answer and resist answering for a child when there are long pauses. This helps them to think about what they have heard, seen and done before coming up with a response. It's ok to use silence, so that it gives the child the space to talk and removes the pressure from the child.

Useful contacts:

Afasic

2nd Floor

50-52 Great Sutton Street

London

EC1V 0DJ

Helpline: 08453 55 55 77

(Local call rate 11am—2pm Monday - Friday)

For information, advice or if you just need to talk.

Tel: 020 7490 9410

www.afasic.org.uk

NAPLIC

National Association for Professionals concerned with Language Impairment in Children)

Chicklade House

Hindon

Salisbury

Wiltshire

SP3

NNELI

(The National Network for Educators of the Language Impaired)

Can be contacted via SENJIT

SENJIT

(Special Educational Needs Joint Initiative for Training)

Institute of Education

University of London

20 Bedford Way

London

WC1H 0AL

Tel: 020 7612

www.ioe.ac.uk

NASEN

(National Association for Special Educational Needs)

NASEN House

4/5 Amber Business Village

Amber Close

Armington

Tamworth

B77 4RP

Tel: 01827 311500

www.nasen.org.uk

Further reading:

I CAN Factsheets:

You may also find these I CAN Factsheets helpful:

For professionals:

- **Factsheet 2**
Classroom Strategies for Primary Schools
- **Factsheet 4**
Pupils with Speech Dyspraxia
- **Factsheet 5**
Pupils with Asperger Syndrome

I CAN, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V QE

Telephone: 0845 225 4073 Fax: 0845 225 4071 Email: info@ican.org.uk

Websites: www.ican.org.uk www.talkingpoint.org.uk

FACTSHEET 1:

Language Difficulties in the Early Years

For parents:

- **Factsheet A**
Speech and Language Difficulties - help in the early years
- **Factsheet B**
Speech and Language Therapy - help in the early years

Further support:

- **Factsheet C**
Useful Contacts
- **Factsheet D**
Useful Reading

I CAN:

I CAN is the children's communication charity. Communication is the essential 21st century life skill – the foundation on which children learn, achieve and make friends. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children. I CAN's particular focus is children who find communication hard.

I CAN works to ensure all people who have a responsibility to children, either directly or indirectly, from parents and teachers to policy makers, understand the importance of good communication skills.

I CAN supporting your work in the early years:

I CAN has a range of resources and programmes to support early years practitioners to develop the communication skills of all children.

- **Early Talk**

An evidence informed learning programme devised to develop the skills of early years practitioners in the vital area of children's communication. *Early Talk* takes practitioners through a journey – from working with a child who is a confident and capable communicator through to working with a child with severe and complex speech and language needs.

- **Talking Point**

The first stop for information on children's communication. Visit www.talkingpoint.org.uk to access essential information on supporting children at home and within the early years setting.

- **Early years resources**

- **Ready Steady Talk**

- A fun-filled activity book to help 2 to 3 year olds get ready for pre-school.

- **Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn DVD**

- A self-study resource for early years practitioners to support children's communication development.

- **Chatter Matters: Making life easier for you and better for your child DVD**

- Helps parents and families support their children's communication development.

- **Short courses and work place training**

Innovative approaches, knowledge and best practice to support the skills development of all children. To book online go to www.ican.org.uk/training

Visit www.ican.org.uk for further information on I CAN's work and to register for I CAN's monthly newsletter.