

## Language “Tips” for Young Children or Children with Difficulties Understanding and Processing Language

### **Listening Skills:**

Some children may have difficulty with the skills needed to listen well. Obviously, we want the children up and active but first we need to have them listen to and understand our directions. Going over the following strategies may help children improve their listening skills:

- Get your body ready (i.e. sit up and stay still, hands at your side and feet in front of you, don't play with things around you, etc.)
- Keep your eyes looking at the person talking
- Keep your ears listening to the person talking (i.e. ignore other noises you “hear”)
- Make sure your brain is thinking about what the person is saying
- No talking when someone else is talking

The “Listening Cues” sheet in this binder can also be used to teach young children good listening skills. First, discuss with the child what each picture means; then use the pictures to reinforce good listening behaviours (e.g. “eyes” → “look at the person who is talking”; you might say “Jonathan has his eyes looking right at me. Good looking, Jonathan”).

Also, you can be a good model – listen to the child when he speaks to you and show him what “good listening” looks like. Don't forget to **praise** good listening.

### **Vocabulary:**

- Use all five senses when describing and teaching new words. For example, when playing with the porcupine ball, describe how it looks, talk about how it feels, the sounds it makes when it hits the floor or you catch it, etc.
- Describe many different characteristics like size, shape, colour, texture.
- You can also talk about what something does, what group or category it belongs to, where it's found and what special parts it has, what it is made of, etc.
- When introducing new words, talk about other words that mean the same thing (e.g. fast-quick) or that are opposites (long-short)
- Encourage the child to let you know if you've used a word that they don't understand.
- Play “guessing games” when you bring out new objects to play with. For example, “The thing I have for us to play with today is round, it rhymes with “tall” and you can bounce it”. This will help build stronger vocabulary skills.

### **Understanding Concepts:**

Be aware that some children may have difficulty understanding basic concepts such as:

- Space concepts (up/down, in/on/under, through/around, between/beside/behind/in front of, away from/next to, above/below, right/left, forward/backward),
- Quantity words (a few/some/many, more/less),
- Comparatives (long/longer/longest)
- Time concepts (beginning/middle/end, first/second/third/last, before/after)

Teach simpler concepts first, gradually adding harder ones. Be sure to “show” the child the concept. It often helps to show contrasting ones together (e.g. top/bottom, long/longer/longest).

## Following Directions:

- Be sure the child is paying attention and looking at you when you are talking. You can get their attention by saying their name, giving a verbal cue (e.g. “Ready to listen”) or giving a tactile cue (e.g. touch their arm).
- Reduce other noises and distractions. Stand close to the child or be sure to sit them as close to you as possible. You might also try amplifying your voice (i.e. use of a microphone or FM system).
- Don’t give too much at once. Keep your instructions short and direct. If there are too many steps involved, give only one or two steps at a time. You can gradually increase the number and complexity of the directions once you know the child can handle more.
- Be aware of when your directions use abstract words and expressions that the child may not understand (e.g. similes like “quiet as a mouse” or “as still as a statue”; figurative language like “That’s driving me crazy”; words that have more than one meaning like “I’m a little hoarse today”.)
- Add visuals such as gestures or pictures
- Be animated; use lots of facial expression
- Emphasize the key words and phrases within a direction so that they stand out.
- Remember to put pauses in your directions so that the child has more time to process the directions and so that the key words stand out.
- You can check comprehension by having the student tell you in **their own words** what they have to do before starting an activity.
- Encourage children to ask you to repeat directions or to explain directions or words that they have not understood.
- In some situations, a child may ask a peer for help but be sure to watch for the child who always watches and follows his peers; this often means a child who is having difficulty following the directions on his own.
- To build language skills, sometimes let the child be the one that gives the directions to the others.

## Help for Children Who Have Difficulties with the “Rules of Conversations”:

- Model taking turns in a conversation. Remind the child that one person says something and then the other person answers. If this is difficult, consider using something like a “talking stick” where the only person who can talk is the one with the stick; as it is passed to others in the circle, it is their “turn” to talk while the others listen.
- Use toy telephones, puppets or make believe to teach the child how to talk. Use words like “hello”, “please”, “just a minute, please”, “bye” or other expressions you would like him to learn.
- Try games like taking turns telling a story or giving directions to help a child learn to take turns, keep the conversation going and stay on the same topic. If your child often goes off topic, redirect him by asking “What were we just talking about? You need to tell me something about that.”
- Model changing topics for your child. You might say “Now we are finished doing \_\_\_\_\_ and are going to do something new”.
- Model an appropriate loudness and rate of speech. Speak as clearly as possible and use pauses in your speech. Praise children when you hear them doing the same thing. Be specific (e.g., “You are talking really slowly and clearly today.”)
- Be sure to model asking for help when you haven’t understood or can’t remember what you are supposed to do. Children will learn from your example and start to imitate you.