Expressive language difficulties

Children with expressive language difficulties may:

- not talk at all or only in limited situations

- not be able to string many words together

- only use key words and miss out grammatical words such as 'he, is, a

- miss out or make errors with word endings such as – ing, plural 's', – ed

- use incorrect vocabulary

- have difficulty retrieving words from their memory resulting in frequent pauses or fillers such as 'erm', 'you know' and 'thingy'

- have difficulties with word order

- use lots of gestures to convey needs and information

- physically take you to what they need or to show the problem

- use another child to talk for them

Strategies for developing expressive language

- give the child **extra time** to express themselves and try not to interrupt. A useful strategy is to pause and silently count to 10

- **listen and show** that you are interested by commenting and asking further questions. Try to balance the two

- questions are useful to clear up confusion, **keep the conversation going**, find out specific information. Try not to use them like a test eg, 'What colour is this?'

- as well as showing that you are listening and interested, **comments** also add new information and model the next steps in language for your child

- it will build the child's confidence if you respond to **what** the child is saying rather than **how** they have said it

- provide a variety of **opportunities** for the child to talk and try not to anticipate their needs before they have had chance to ask e.g. during story time, meal times, whilst playing, out in the car, going to the shops

- **invite** children to tell you things eg, 'I bet you had a good time on holiday'

- **help them organise** what they are saying by using words such as and then… because… after…

- tell the child what you think you have understood so far, but **give them a chance** to tell you if you have got it wrong

- use **visual aids** to help conversation with the child eg, photos, picture books, objects

- a **home-school diary** will enable parents and school staff to record information that the child is likely to talk about, for example weekend activities

- **repeat** the child's sentence back to them using the correct structure eg, "him falled down them", "yes he's fallen down the steps"

- with older children, **explain word/word endings** and why they are important ie, "when there is more than one object you add an 's' to the end"

- **sentence closure** may be used to elicit specific word/ word endings eg, "there is one pencil and here are 2 … (pencils)"

- if a child uses a general word, tell them the more specific word eg, if the child says 'I went to see the **man**' say 'you went to see the **doctor**'.

How to help

Choices: give the child 2 choices of what they would like to eat, play with etc. For example "do you want to play in the sand or with bricks?" This gives the child the vocabulary they need to respond and is easier than using an open ended question.

Role reversal: give the child instructions such as "colour the hat blue" or "where's the cat's tail?" then swap over and let the child be the "teacher" .

Sabotage technique: set up a situation which encourages the child to make some form of comment or request eg, the adult keeps some of the pieces of a puzzle back or only gives the child a small amount of juice so that they will want more.

Modeling: model language appropriate to the child's ability eg, with a younger child name objects and actions during everyday situations, for an older child model the use of connectives ie, 'and' 'so' 'because'.

Adding language: add words to the child's sentences to help develop their spoken language eg, child says "kick ball", adult replies "the boy is kicking the ball". As the child's skills develop, start to model describing words and connectives.

For further information and advice please contact Speech and Language Therapy on 514 2334.

If you would like this information in another format, please contact the Your Experience Team on freephone 0800 694 5530. Alternatively you can email wcnt.yourexperience@nhs.net

July 2019 V2

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