

## Supporting children to understand language

Having a good understanding of language is vital for learning and thinking.

To understand language we need to:

- Understand the meaning of words
- Understand how grammar and putting sentences together affect meaning
- Understand the context behind the language used
- For example that 'bat' can mean something that flies or a piece of sports equipment
- Understand jokes, puns and idioms
- Understand non-verbal aspects of language, such as sarcasm and tone of voice

With so many things to think about at the same time, it's easy to see why some children may experience difficulties in learning to understand language.

Strategies to support children at home and in the classroom:

- Before giving information or instructions, make sure you have the child's attention.
- You can check by saying their name and looking for a response.
- Speak slowly. This helps children take in new information.
- Pause between sentences. This allows children time to process what was said and also gives them time to respond
- Support what you are saying with something the child can see. For example, use gestures, pictures or objects
- Recognise and praise your child's efforts to listen and understand

Strategies to support your child to understand instructions

Recognise that when children are first learning, long sentences and complex words will make it too hard for them to understand and remember everything

To help children learn to understand instructions:

- Keep your sentences short and simple
- Give only one instruction at a time
- Break down tasks into individual parts
- Give separate instructions for each smaller task
- Only say the next step after your child has completed the first one

Developing their skills further

When your child can easily follow simple, one step instructions, you can encourage them to develop their skills all the more, by increasing the level of difficulty. Here are some ideas of things to try:

- Increase the length and complexity of the sentence you use
- At first, be sure to say things in the order they need to be completed. For example: 'First put your socks on, then put your shoes on'

- When they have mastered this, increase the difficulty by trying:  
'Put your shoes on after you have put your socks on'  
or  
'Put your socks on, then put your shoes on. After that, get your coat'
- Gradually reduce the amount of visual support used - such as gestures, pictures or objects

Help children to help themselves by encouraging them to:

- Check they have understood what has been said
- Ask for help if they are not sure they understand