Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

How to Support Children with Language Difficulties in the Classroom

Around 10% of children have a speech, language and/or communication need, with 3/4 of these children meeting the criteria for Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). This equates to 3 children in a class of 30 who have difficulties with using and/or understanding language.

The strategies highlighted below will also support the continued language development of other children in the classroom.

Make it visual - Remember that spoken words are 'said and gone' - visual supports are permanent and therefore they allow time for processing, support with transitions, build independence and reduce anxiety. Examples of visual supports include:

Written words
Natural gesture and signing (for example, Makaton)
Symbols
Drawings
Photos
Hands-on activities
Word maps
Task plans
Colourful semantics

WHAT CATEGORY is it in?
Vehicles

WHO goes on it?
A pilot/co-pilot
Air steward/ess
Customers

WHAT is it LIKE?
Big and powerful
Made of metal/glass
Has wheels, wings, engine, cockpit, tail
A helicopter is similar

WHEN do you use one?
Holidays!
When visiting family abroad
Work trips
To move things far away (post/presents/luggage)

WHERE do you find it?
At an airport
In the sky

What does it DO?
Flies
Lands
Zooms
Crashes

Aeroplane

How many syllables (claps) does it have?
3

What sound does it start with?
'air'

What does it rhyme with?
Again, chain, main
'The aeroplane is going to Spain'

Create predictable structure throughout the day - Use songs to represent tidy up time, hand washing time, lunchtime etc. Create and use a visual timetable with Velcro - encourage children to take it in turns to 'post' the symbols on the timetable into a post box once each activity is finished

Keep your language simple and consistent ('maths is finished, it's time for snack' 'snack is finished, it's time for phonics'). It's important to give instructions in 'chronological order' - for example 'put your pen in your tray, then sit on the carpet' is better than 'come and sit on the carpet after you've put your pen in your tray'

Create a safe environment - Praise children who ask for help and demonstrate that it's ok for them to make mistakes. **Give them plenty of processing time**, particularly when giving verbal instructions. **Make comments instead of asking direct questions** where possible, and give them the opportunity to discuss their thoughts e.g. 'I wonder what would happen if I mixed blue and yellow...'. **Reassure them** that school is to help them to learn - they aren't expected to know everything, that's why they are in your class! We know from adults with Developmental Language Disorder that this is really important

Check children's understanding often - Observe the child's response and body language - Make sure you create opportunities within your lesson plan to monitor children's understanding of what you have covered, for example by asking for volunteers to repeat back what they've been asked to do

Be sure that any words you use within your lesson are already familiar to the child by **pre-teaching key vocabulary**. A high level of repetition is key here – Evidence shows that children with language difficulties require on average 36 exposures to a new word, before they add it to their own vocabulary (Storkel et al., 2019)

Consider the environment - reduce background noise where possible, introduce new topics early in the day, consider seating plans

Model back language errors without drawing direct attention to the error that the child has made. For example:
Child: I writed a story in my thingy
Adult: Ah yes, you wrote a story in your English book

Remember that **spoken language difficulties will impact on written work**. Provide sentence starters to support the child to write their ideas down, so that they can focus on the content of the lesson rather than the challenge of thinking up a full sentence e.g. 'at the weekend I…' 'after we put the ice in the jar we…' 'Volcanoes explode when…'

Focus the child's attention by using their name or gently tapping their arm before you speak to them, particularly before you give an instruction or ask a question

Consider the child's language level - if they typically speak using short phrases, you should also use short phrases when asking them to follow instructions. Also **consider which question words you are using** with the child; some types of question are harder to answer. The easiest questions to answer are who/what, followed by where/when, and the most difficult are why/how.

If you have tried using these strategies and you still have concerns about the impact that your child's language difficulties are having, you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice:

  https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/speech-and-language-therapy/

- Contact us via our 'Request for Help' line – see our website for further details

- You can also access further information from the following websites:

  https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

  https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/

  https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/toddler/learning-to-talk/learning-to-talk-3-to-5-years/

Reference: The Impact of Dose Frequency on Word Learning by Kindergarten Children with Developmental Language Disorder During Interactive Book Reading. (Storkel et al., 2019). Language, Speech and Hearing Services In School, Vol 50, Issue 4.