

## How to support children's comprehension

The English language is complicated. There is a vast vocabulary, many grammar rules (most of which have multiple exceptions) and even when you understand a word, its meaning often changes depending on the context. It's hardly surprising that many children struggle with language comprehension. In fact, it's amazing that more children don't struggle with it. It's a minefield!

Language comprehension is so important and when you notice that your child is struggling, it can be difficult to know how to help. Every child is different but here are 8 tools to help your children develop their comprehension skills.



### Get the child's attention

When understanding is hard work, it is natural to stop listening. We all do this, for example, if we are trying to follow a conversation in a foreign language. Say your child's name and take time to get their full attention before you try to help with the misunderstanding.

### Use a different word

It could be the vocabulary which your child is struggling to understand. Try using a different word. For example, if your child is confused by having to "estimate" something, try saying "guess". If they are not sure what miserable means, try "sad". Be aware that understanding a word in one context does not necessarily mean that you will always understand it when you hear it. Even if you think the child knows what a word means, try using a simpler one.

### Say it another way

It might be the sentence structure that is hard for your child to follow. Keep it simple by saying things in the order that they are going to happen. For instance, instead of "Before you watch TV, you need to tidy up", say "Tidy up. Then you can watch TV".

Say things directly. Instead of "Aren't you cold?", say "Do you need your jumper?" or "Jumper?"

## Use all your senses

Be creative in how you communicate and don't just use words. Show your child. Demonstrate. Use photos and pictures. Use gesture. Children with language difficulties can often understand things better if they are presented visually or if they are able to do something rather than just talking about it. Use as many different channels to communicate as you can, and encourage your child to do the same.

## Ask

Ask your child to explain what they have understood. Question words can be particularly tricky for children to understand, so just ask an open question such as "What do you need to do?" or "What did your Dad say?" Listening to what your child says can often help to identify where the breakdown has occurred and which bit needs some extra help. They may have understood 80% of what was said but misunderstood one vital bit. Make sure you're explaining the right bit!

## Make links

We all learn better if new words and concepts are related to information we already know. For example, if you are teaching the word "temperature", link it to the words "hot" and "cold". Don't assume you know what your child understands—check it out and then start from there. Keep linking back to known words.

## Keep it short

Short sentences are easier to understand than long ones. Cut one long sentence down into 2 or 3 short ones, with pauses between each one. Stick to the main point.

## Stop!

Sometimes we can be so intent on explaining something to our children, in lots of different ways that we inadvertently confuse them more. Pause and give yourself (and your child) time to think. Say one thing and then wait before saying more. Give one instruction at a time. With an older child, teach them to give a signal when they are ready for more, for example nodding. Alternatively ask them if they are ready.

Above all, keep trying! Give your child time and let them know that you are trying to help. This will encourage them to keep trying and feel positive about learning!