



Happy Talk's Top 10 Tips for Developing Understanding of Language

1. Gain your Child's Attention



Gain your child's attention before you give an instruction or before you speak to them. You can do this by getting down to their level, saying their name or giving them a touch prompt. This will help to ensure that their focus is on you when you are speaking.

Changing the sound of your voice e.g., using a higher pitch; can also help to keep your child's attention.

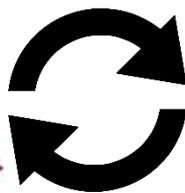
2. Break Instructions Down

Breaking instructions down into parts will help your child to understand and follow what you are saying e.g., instead of saying "go upstairs, get your shoes and put them on" you can break it down into three parts and give them one instruction at a time e.g., "go upstairs" - "get your shoes" - "put your shoes on."

TASK 1
TASK 2
TASK 3



3. Repeat



Repeating instructions and what you have said to your child will help them to understand. A child may need to hear an instruction more than once to be able to follow it. Repeating what you have said gives your child time to process what they have heard in order to make a response. It is important to make sure your child is attending to what you are saying whilst you are repeating.

It is important to repeat words many times as a child needs to hear a word 200 times in context before they are able to understand and use it themselves!



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4. Use Simple Language



Keeping language simple by using single words and short sentences makes it easier for children to understand what you are saying. You can model vocabulary by talking about what they are looking at e.g., "train" or "big train." This helps to develop their understanding of words and connect the word to the object or situation.

5. Give your Child Time to Process Information

By listening and waiting after you have said something to your child, you give them time to listen, process and then make their response. This could take up to 10 seconds. If your child does not respond, try repeating what you have said again.



6. Use Visuals



We all benefit from using visuals to support our understanding such pictures and symbols like road signs and maps. Using visuals with children really helps to develop and support their understanding. You can use; pictures, videos, objects, natural gesture and signing to support the spoken word. Visuals are permanent and allow time for processing whereas the spoken word disappears once it has been said.

7. Think about the Questions you Ask

We all ask questions, and when a child is asked a question, they are expected to respond. Their ability to understand what you have asked will depend on how difficult the question is and how good their language skills are. You can help your child to answer questions by:

- Avoiding questions that are too complicated for your child. If they are struggling to answer, rephrase your question. 'Who' 'what' and 'where' questions are easier to answer than 'why' 'when' and 'how' questions.
- Giving your child plenty of time to think of and give their reply.
- Avoiding asking another question before your child has had time to answer the first one.
- Reduce the number of questions you ask and comment instead e.g., "what's that?" → "it's a car!"





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8. Use Literal Language

He has lost his marbles.



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If your child is having difficulty understanding language, it would be useful to make sure you use literal language when you are talking.

Figurative/non-literal language such as sarcasm, idioms, similes, and metaphors will be more difficult to understand.

If you do use non-literal/figurative language, make sure you explain what it means using simple language that your child can understand e.g., "it's raining cats and dogs" → "it's raining very hard!"

9. Tell your child what you want them to DO

Telling your child what you want them to do rather than not do will support their understanding. This is because the negative part of the sentence may not be understood and instead of hearing "don't run" they will hear the last part of the instruction and interpret it as "run." You can tell your child what you would like them to do instead e.g., "walk." This also makes the instruction shorter, clearer, and positive.



10. Check Hearing



If your child has not had a hearing test recently, it would be useful to rule this out as a reason to why they are having difficulty with their understanding of language. For example, between the ages of 2 and 6, it is very common for children to experience 'glue ear' which results in dulled hearing which can be likened to hearing underwater. For a child's understanding to be able to develop, they need to be able to hear the words and sentences they need to learn and understand. You can go to your GP and ask for a referral to Audiology for a hearing test.

Get in Touch!



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