

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT
“Language for Learning – A Checklist for Language Difficulties (Primary)”

LANGUAGE HELP SHEETS

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“Language for Learning – A Checklist for
Language Difficulties (Primary)”

Oz-Child. The Checklists can be purchased from Oz-Child Education Services

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LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR:

Refers to how a language disorder may impact on the way a child acts and reacts in different situations and environments. Children with language difficulties can exhibit a variety of behaviours from being quiet and withdrawn to being a major behaviour problem in the classroom. These behaviours may be particularly apparent during tasks that they find difficult or when they do not understand what is being required of them.

Children have problems in a range of expressive language situations (spoken and written) and may present with all or some of the following characteristics in the classroom:

- Child presents as quiet and withdrawn not wanting to draw attention to themselves and their language difficulties.
 - Frequently “tunes out” in class or is restless.
 - Is distracting or acting the “class clown” taking attention away from their learning difficulties.
 - Slow to start tasks.
 - Copying other students in the classroom.
 - Disorganised with homework
 - Act impulsively
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Some practical strategies to help in the classroom:

Seating location - Maximise the child’s opportunity to hear instructions by seating the child at the front of the class and ensure the child is close to you and attending when you are giving instructions.

Communicating between school and home - Use of a diary or communication book/folder can be used to aide communication between home and school regarding homework and can be a permanent place to record and keep homework tasks.


Visual Instructions/routines - Have the classroom routine clearly displayed using pictures or symbols to support written information.

Emphasize, Repeat – Emphasize key points/ important information using clear, concise language and repeat instructions/explanations using simple clear language.

Emphasize the positives – give the child opportunities to show their areas of skill within the class, praising good behaviour and involvement in task.

Remember to seek to resolve the core issues of language difficulties behind the behaviour problems and not just focus on the behaviour itself.

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VERBAL MEMORY/SEQUENCING:

Children commonly present with difficulty attending to, discriminating, recognizing or understanding auditory (spoken) signals that cannot be directly attributed to either impaired hearing sensitivity or intellectual impairment.

Children present with problems in a number of listening areas and may display all or some of the following characteristics in the classroom.

- Difficulty understanding speech in the presence of background noise or competing speech
 - Frequently loses track of the lesson
 - Speaks too loud – can’t monitor own voice against background noise
 - Seems to hear but not understand what people say
 - Mishears everyday language, therefore gains a corrupted meaning, and responds inappropriately or off topic
 - Highly distractible and hyperactive OR becomes withdrawn and acquiescent
 - Frequent inattentiveness and poor attention span
 - Difficulty understanding verbal directions, gets verbal information confused
 - Academic underachievement and delayed literacy development because of auditory-phonetic confusions
 - Social Awkwardness – difficulty with peer group relationships
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Reduce distractions – Avoid extraneous noise and visual distractions especially when it is important that the child concentrates and listens to new concepts


Preferential Seating – Provide seating away from known auditory and visual distractions such as doorways, fans, computers and close to front of classroom/teachers desk. Experimentation may be required to determine best position.

Delivery Style – Avoid multiple commands. Present instructions in a way that is distinct, clear and precise.

- Chunk information: present short, sharp fragments of key information and allow time to think before continuing.
- Develop a structured routine in classroom so children know what to expect and don’t have to rely so heavily on remembering every instruction.

Gain attention – Before giving instructions gain students attention by calling his/her name or touching his/her shoulder

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Visual Aids – Visual aids such as overhead projectors and computers may be used to supplement oral presentation. Children may learn better from visual information than from auditory information.

Instructional Transitions – By reviewing past material before beginning each new lesson, the student will be in a better position to assimilate new information. Pre-teaching and home assignments will also help when introducing new concepts and topics.

Check Comprehension – To check for understanding the student should be asked to repeat the instructions in his/her own words. Ask specific questions to check understanding of instructions given rather than “Did you hear me?”

Buddy System – A buddy system can be established by one student who appears to have strong auditory skills helping the student who is having difficulty. This assistance may include note-taking, assistance with instructions and small group projects.

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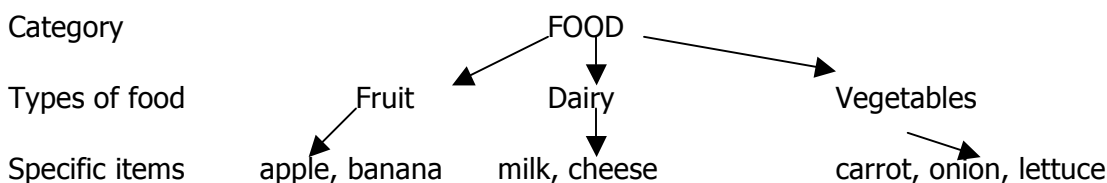
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COMPREHENSION

Comprehension refers to the understanding of spoken and/or written language, also referred to as receptive language. Comprehension involves recognising words and sentence structures being used and interpreting the information.

Students with comprehension difficulties will experience difficulties understanding presented information. These students may be labeled as ‘not listening’, ‘doing the wrong thing’ or ‘switching off’. They may incorrectly follow teacher instructions, have difficulty taking notes and messages, as well as provide off target responses as a result of processing a few key words rather than the entire statement.

- Support spoken information with visual cues, such as gestures, pictures, flowcharts and model tasks whenever possible.
- Use short term auditory memory strategies to assist with hearing and processing information:
 - Gain the student’s attention before providing information.
 - Present information in short, manageable units (use short sentences and ‘chunk’ information)
 - PAUSE between sentences
 - When repeating information, restate information in a SIMPLE manner
- Check the student’s understanding of instructions/information by asking them to retell it in their own words.
- Teach the student to ask for clarification when she/he has not understood the information.
- Present instructions in order that the tasks are to be completed e.g. “Do ‘A’, then do ‘B’” instead of saying “Do ‘B’ after you have done ‘A’”.
- Teach new vocabulary using a hierarchical approach i.e. teaches related words which can be grouped together into categories and subcategories. Explain words in context. e.g.



- Frequently revisit new vocabulary, provide lots of repetition and reinforce the vocabulary concepts in other contexts.
- Teach the students to make links between new and previously learnt information through discussion, making of word wheels, brainstorming trees or mind maps.

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- Pre-teach vocabulary for any new topic, before the topic is introduced at a classroom level.
 - Teach the student different question forms and their meanings e.g. ‘what’ refers to things, ‘when’ refers to time, ‘where’ refers to place.
 - Teach multiple meanings of words in context.
 - Assist and teach the student how to break down long assignments, readings and books. Use strategies such as recognising sentences and paragraphs, highlighting key words/points, writing notes on the side of the page, sequencing the ideas, drawing pictures/ mind maps/ flow charts.
 - Teach the student to recognize and understand different grammatical structures.
 - Teach the student to form visual images of spoken information as a way of helping them remember spoken/written information.
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EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE / STORY TELLING

Good expressive language enables a student to use well formed and grammatically appropriate sentences. Explanations are clear precise and include relevant and important information within a logical sequence.

Classroom Presentation:

A student who has difficulties in this area would most likely display some of the following signs:

- Having difficulty thinking of and using specific words to describe, explain, and/or ask questions.
- Rarely ask questions.
- Avoid or become anxious about oral tasks for example telling ‘news’.
- Will rarely contribute to classroom discussions.
- When asked questions may give one word answers or long non specific answers.
- Written descriptions may be poorly sequenced or lack important detail.
- May take a long time to write descriptions/ sentences/ stories that require own thoughts.
- Shouldn’t have difficulty with spelling and dictation tasks.

These difficulties may be observed during:

- Group work
- ‘News’ / ‘Show and tell’
- Classroom discussions
- Story telling/ narratives/ descriptions
- Conversation
- Asking and responding to questions

Strategies:

- Plan and allow extra time.
- Give student cues in giving descriptions e.g. colour, size, what it does, group it belongs to.
- Remind students to include the important parts of a sentence, who/what it’s about, what action happened, who/what did the action happen to.
- Tell students how to plan e.g. write down the key points, have a beginning, middle & end, and include one main point to each paragraph.
- Have a form the students can use then fill in the gaps for the items that need to be included to form a story.
- Give student a format to use when asking questions, e.g. ‘If you have difficulty say, “I don’t understand” or “why does ----- happen?”’.
- Tell students in advance what question you will ask them so they have time to prepare.
- Give student extra set time for planning alone with oral and written tasks e.g. class discussions, story writing.

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- Use a plan for telling news, e.g. talk about one event, say when it happened, what was most important about it, who was there, where it happened, what happened at the beginning, middle and end.
- Use cues to aide the student with descriptions e.g. pictures, objects, sounds.

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WORD RETRIEVAL / VOCABULARY

A sound knowledge of words and their meanings enables a student to rapidly select the appropriate word from their vocabulary.

Classroom Presentation: A student who has difficulties in this area would most likely display some of the following signs:

- The student appears to participate well in conversation, with well formed sentences, but will tend to provide less specific information than their peers.
- Frequent pauses in speech while the student attempts to retrieve a suitable word from their vocabulary.
- Speech or writing is inefficient, contains a lot of non-specific words (e.g. ‘thing’), or appears to ‘go around’ the target word.
- Frequently asking questions about the meaning of words.
- Difficulty remembering names and new words.

These difficulties may be observed during:

- Story telling / writing
- Show and tell
- Conversation
- Response to questions

Strategies:

- Encourage the student to describe the object (or action, feeling, etc) that they are having difficulty naming or use another word that means almost the same.
- Ask specific questions to get more information from the student.
- Encourage the student to use gesture.
- Allow the student additional time to answer a question or tell a story.
- If you know the word that the student looking for, give him/her a clue using the first sound or letter in the word rather than saying the whole word for them.
- Encourage older students to look up new words in the dictionary and copy out the definition.

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SOCIAL LANGUAGE SKILLS: PRAGMATICS

Refers to the way in which language difficulties may impact on a student’s social interactions with others both in and outside the classroom and both in and outside the context of classroom tasks. Students with these difficulties are often socially isolated and have difficulty making friends.

Children have problems in a range of expressive language situations (spoken and written) and may present with all or some of the following characteristics in the classroom.

- Makes inappropriate comments
 - Difficulty identify shifts in conversation topics
 - Difficulty making maintaining friendships
 - Poor conversation skills:
 - difficulty with turn-taking
 - introducing topics
 - maintaining topics
 - reiterate others ideas or clarify during conversation
 - use language, body language and facial expression to demonstrate (empathic) listening skills
 - Misinterprets or doesn’t detect social cues communicated through facial expression and body language
 - Processes language literally and has difficulty interpreting and detecting sarcasm, humour, slang, ambiguity
 - Has difficulty manipulating language for varying social situations and needs e.g. to persuade, negotiate, gossip, joke
 - Unable to defend themselves verbally and may resort to physical aggression or respond in ways that seem inappropriate
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Some practical strategies for the classroom:

- Give the student time to formulate responses and offer prompts to help the student structure language and generate the vocabulary they need to express themselves.
- Be aware of when sarcasm, or ambiguous language is being used and check that the student has comprehended correctly.
- Use simple language.
- Offer feedback on their interactions and be available to explain what they are doing wrong if the student is willing for you to assist in this way.
- Provide opportunities to practice social skills through role play and rehearsal.
- Students may need further assistance 1:1 or in a small group to learn and practice conversation skills
- Make the student who has social language difficulties an important member of the classroom...if a teacher says ,“I am so happy that Madeline will be helping us with

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our art work today”... it makes other children appreciate the child and therefore include that child in their interactions.

- Focus on the child’s strengths as a way of celebrating that child’s abilities within the classroom
- The “You Can Do It” program has a range of skills in the “Getting Along” section about social skills related to getting along.
- Talk specifically about how to talk to different people – talking to a teacher is different to talking to a peer. These can be in a whole class context.

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SAYING COMPLEX WORDS

REFERS TO THE STUDENTS’ ABILITY TO SAY WORDS THAT:

- are multisyllabic
- have consonant blends
- have developmentally more difficult sounds in them

Students with difficulty saying complex words will often have difficulty saying words such as *spaghetti, strawberry; train, thermometer* etc... This may either make their speech less intelligible to both their peers and teachers and also show in their written language e.g. “I fort he ate psketti”. These students may need assistance with their speech and will benefit from both phonological awareness work and patient modeling of words that are difficult.

Strategies Include:

- Model the correct form of the word incidentally – e.g. “Yes I like to drink cor-di-al too!”
- Assist the student to break the word into syllables. They may clap their hands or tap their fingers on the desk while they are saying a complex word. Talk about how each single syllable sounds and gradually help the student to blend them together e.g. com – pu – ter...
- Remind the student to slow down and think about what they need to say.
- Break words that have consonant blends that are difficult into sounds and assist the student to blend them together e.g. “t...rain...; play..; mas...k”
- Make rhymes or stories about how words are said e.g. imagine a lamb with a pea on its head to remember how to say *lamp* etc...
- Use written language to show the student how the word both looks and sounds with an emphasis on breaking the word into syllables
- PRAISE the student when they do say the word correctly
- If the student says the word incorrectly, give them a forced choice with the correct model emphasized e.g. “Did you have *psgetti* or spag ett i?”
- Know what sounds are developmentally appropriate for children to say.

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SOUND AWARENESS

Knowledge of the sounds and syllables in words and the ability to manipulate these to create new words and different sounds. This also includes knowledge of the relationship between speech sounds and the letters that can represent them.

Classroom Presentation: A student who has difficulties in this area would most likely display some of the following signs:

- Difficulty selecting pairs of rhyming words and coming up with new words that rhyme with a given word.
- Difficulty breaking words down into separate sounds or syllables.
- Limited ability to count the sounds or syllables in a word.
- Slow to learn the names of new letters and their relationship to different sounds.
- Difficulty spelling and reading.
- The student may have a history of speech sound errors.
- Spelling of vowels can be particularly difficult.

These difficulties may be observed during:

- Reading
- Writing

Strategies and activities:

- Have an alphabet chart, a THRASS chart and a dictionary available for the students refer to.
- Encourage students to consider more than one option when working out how to pronounce a written word or spell a word.
- Encourage students to clap out the syllables in words.
- Count the sounds in words.
- Attempt to familiarise students with different sounds that can be represented by the same letter (e.g. ‘c’ in ‘camp’, ‘recess’).
- Think about different letters that represent the same sound (e.g. /f/ in ‘fish’, ‘photo’ and ‘laugh’).
- Focus on spelling of vowels, especially when two letters represent one vowel sound (e.g. ‘ea’ in ‘beach’, ‘fear’).
- Ask child to select words that have the same group of sounds in them.
e.g. Which of the following words have ‘ear’ hidden in them?

fear	nest
deer	hear
far	beak

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