

Speech and Language Therapy Service

Understanding Speech



Understanding each other

Think what might happen if these phrases were not understood:

(to a child) "You mustn't touch, it's very hot."

(to the milkman) "No milk for 2 weeks, we're away on holiday."

(to medical staff) "I'm allergic to penicillin."

How we understand

Words are only part of the story. In order to understand what someone is saying we use other clues, for example:

- pointing and gesture
- facial expression
- tone of voice
- knowledge of what usually happens
- other people's actions or reactions.

Many parents say that their child understands everything they say to him - but does he understand the words or is he picking up the other clues? By about 2 years children can understand a simple command such as 'put the bear in the boat', 'point to your nose'. There are many reasons why a child may not fully understand what is being said to him. Your speech and language therapist will give you advice and may devise a programme to help.



There are also several ways you can help:

Make sure your child is listening when you are speaking to him.

Attract his attention by saying his name and getting eye contact first.

Make a quiet time. Background noise such as the television or radio is distracting so switch them off when you talk to each other.

Use simple language to start with - short sentences said clearly and slowly will be more helpful than lots of details. For example say “ more bubbles ?“ not “do you want me to make some more bubbles for you?”

Talk about what is happening now and not what will happen. Relate the word you are saying to the actual object or action by talking about activities as you are doing them, for example: when dressing, eating, at bath time, bedtime, going shopping.

Use lots of repetition of the same words. For example at bath time you can say “wash face, wash hands, wash feet.

Looking and Listening

Play pointing games. If you have a selection of a few objects, for example, a cup, a ball, a brush and a shoe, you can ask your child to show you. Say "show me the cup" In this way you can tell if he is listening and understanding you. Look at books together. Try to choose books with clear, simple pictures. Photos are especially useful. Talk about the pictures and ask your child to point to pictures that you name, for example, "can you see the dog?", "look at your swing".

For further information about this service contact:

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If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.