

## Supporting Understanding

The suggestions below can help you in supporting your child to understand language you use at home.

### Comprehension Monitoring Activities

Explain the reasons why we may not understand others: Explain to the child that there are times that we do not understand information or instructions given to us. This can often be the result of the way the message is delivered: for example, it can be too fast, too quiet or not enough detail. Explain that it is not our fault that we do not understand and that it is okay to ask for help.

Go through the following reasons:

- **RATE** – Say: ‘I might talk really, really fast so you don’t know what I’m saying’. Demonstrate this, talking very fast.
- **VOLUME** – Say: ‘I might talk so quietly that you can’t hear me, or there might be noise so you can’t hear me, like a cough or a yawn. Demonstrate this, talking quietly and with yawns etc.
- **BACKGROUND NOISE** is also a factor that may be discussed at this stage. This affects what the listener hears but it is not the fault of the speaker or the listener. Use tape-recorded noise (music or ‘hubbub’) to show this.
- **INSTRUCTIONS** – give the child a range of instructions to carry out – some too fast, some too quiet (or with a noise over a key word) and some that the child can do. See if they can spot the problem, and ask what the adult could do to make it a ‘good’ instruction.
- **NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION** – explain to the child that there can be another problem – they might not be told enough information, so that what they are asked to do might not make sense. Explain that sometimes people forget to give enough information or they think that you already know something, so they do not tell you.
- **IMPOSSIBILITIES** – have a selection of small items (for example pens, toy cars, pencils), some of which should be the same colour and the same size. An array could be for example a red pen, a long red pencil, a short red pencil, a red beanbag and a blue beanbag.  
Give a range of instructions to be done with the objects – some impossible, some do-able such as: o ‘Give me the red one’, (not specific

– omits the object type) o ‘Give me the pencil/beanbag’, (not specific – omits the colour) o Give that to me’ (impossible – not specific) o Give me the pencil (not specific – omits the object length) o Give me the long pencil (do-able) o Give me the blue one (do-able) Adding more objects (such as another blue item) changes the ‘do-ability’ of instructions. Make a point of blaming the adult for impossible instructions, saying: ‘Silly me – I should have given you more information...’) you can add a board game to make it ‘fun’. Take turns – the child can practice giving instructions also. Discuss how to give good instructions that can be carried out.

- **LENGTH OF INSTRUCTION:** the speaker might use a very long sentence, so the listener cannot remember it. Say: ‘For example, I might say, can you tell the teacher in room 6 that you won’t be in tomorrow after two o’clock because your mum says you have to go to your gran’s house after going to the doctors. That was a really long message. Long messages can be hard to understand because there is so much to remember’. The adult then gives instructions with a mix of ‘easy’ and ‘too long’ sentences. The child is to indicate that the message was too long and say whether they could do the instruction or not. The child will not necessarily seek a repetition or clarification at this stage; they will just indicate a communication breakdown.
- **VOCABULARY:** the person talking might use a word we do not know Say: ‘For example...if I asked you to draw me a picture of an herbivore, would you be able to do it? Or what if I asked you to tell me what an ophthalmologist does? Those might be words that not everyone knows, so not everyone would be able to do what I asked’. Play a game to practice spotting messages with ‘hard’ words in them

### **Practice Activities to identify why we don’t always understand.**

Explain that you will be using games to practice all the things the child has found out about messages, and that they could be too fast, too quiet, missing information, too long or have too hard words. Play a board game here the adult gives child an instruction and if the child completes the instruction correctly, they get to move on one space. If

the child can identify why they cannot complete the instruction (i.e. identify the speaker problem) they also get to move on a space.

The adult should use instructions that vary according to the speaker problems listed. If necessary, prompt the child, asking 'Can you do that one?'

### **Introduce Clarification Strategies**

Having identified the difficulties that can occur from both a listener and a speaker perspective, we need to make sure that the child has some strategies in place to seek clarification or repetition.

This is the key point of comprehension monitoring work – getting the child to actively seek clarification and checking their own understanding, so that they do not sit quietly hoping not to be chosen or noticed.

Discuss: What could we do if we do not understand? Encourage the child to think of some things they could say or do if they do not understand. It may help to give them some scenarios (for example say something that is too fast or too long).

List the actions or questions the child comes up with to use as a reference. Introduce visuals, for example, traffic lights or faces.

- Good examples of clarification questions to teach include:
- Could you say that again please?
- Could you say that more slowly please?
- Could you say that a little bit at a time please?
- I don't understand that
- Could you tell me what that means?
- Sorry?

The child may well be using some of these terms already, but it is worth doing some extra practice of them and making them explicit.

### **Practice Activities to Seek Clarification**

- **BARRIER GAME** - have two copies of a detailed picture, and a selection of pens and pencils. Colour in one copy and keep it hidden. Give the child the other picture and give instructions about which bit to colour in. Some

instructions should be correct and do-able, but others can be too long, too quiet, have a cough or other noise making them, have not enough information or use difficult vocabulary. For example, say:

- Colour that bit (not enough information).
  - Colour his head fuchsia (difficult vocabulary needs pink)
  - Use the blue one to colour his feet (not a specific choice of light or dark blue)
  - After you pick up the light green pen then you should take the top off of it and then put it down on the table beside the red one and then put the top back on and then get the yellow one and use that one to colour in the hair (too long).
  - Encourage the child to ask for clarification – the idea is that their picture should look identical to yours. If they guess, they are more likely to make mistakes. This activity can be repeated with several different pictures to allow for practice of asking for clarification.
- **SIMON SAYS** – play a variation of ‘Simon Says’ using a range of good and bad instructions. For example, touch your nose; touch your cranium; before you touch your elbow you have to stand on one leg and then turn around 4 times and then clap your hands once but before that, you should say your name aloud and then wave your left hand. Again, encourage the child to use their new skills to ask for clarification.