

## Language and Communication Strategies for Secondary School Students

### **General Understanding**

The student may not always be aware that he/she hasn't understood.

- Always ask questions to check understanding and create an environment where it is acceptable for him/her to say that he/she doesn't understand what has been said or ask for repetition.
- **He/she may process language slowly** so speak slowly and allow plenty of time for him/her to process and understand what you've said.
- **He/she may find it difficult to follow a group discussion** so make sure that only one person talks at a time. Recap on the main points covered in the discussion.
- **He/she may only concentrate for a limited period**; alternate listening tasks with 'doing' tasks, refocus her attention when required; review what has been learned/discussed and allow regular 'learning breaks' to help maintain concentration span.

### **Memory**

If it is difficult for him/her to remember a lot of spoken information:

- **Reduce** the amount of information given in one go
- Support spoken information with **visual information** – gesture, drawing, writing, schedules, timetables, facial expression, pictures, signs.
- Encourage **note taking** via words and pictures by helping the student identify the main words
- **Emphasise the main words** in the sentence. Repeat yourself if necessary
- **Encourage memory techniques** – repeating to self, visualisation, note-taking with words and pictures, mind maps.

### **Complex Language**

He/she may have difficulty understanding complex instructions

- Give one instruction at a time;
- Use bullet points or pictures/symbols for each instruction.
- He/she may have difficulty understanding complex grammar - use simple sentences.

### **Attention**

He/she may find it difficult to filter out background noise of equipment or people and to ignore distractions

- Reduce background noise when possible or sit her away from it.
- Keep tasks short with clear objectives
- Vary activities to maintain interest
- Try and have an area that is quiet with fewer distractions

## Organisation

- Provide guidance in identifying the steps involved in a task and have a **visual** reminder present as necessary e.g. story planner, visual note taking.
- Use **visual templates** which break down a narrative task into steps i.e. who, where, what happened first, next, last.
- When doing a piece of written work, encourage him/her to do a visual plan to break down the task into stages.
- Encourage the use of a daily diary to aid personal organisation including clear information about homework or a checklist to record anything he/she needs to plan

## Vocabulary

He/she needs particular attention paid to the way in which vocabulary is introduced, how links are made to other concepts within a subject and how the information is then consolidated and reviewed.

## Developing Vocabulary Knowledge – Key Points for Subject Teachers

- Do not assume knowledge of words as there will be many ‘gaps’ in his/her vocabulary knowledge
- Teach new words specifically, particularly specialist, subject-specific words.
- Give clear definitions of words to practise – use word webs to show the main ideas
- Use visual cues such as pictures, diagrams, photos, symbols or signs to add meaning to a word.
- Make clear links to prior knowledge
- Use the word in different sentences and contexts, as this how new vocabulary is best learnt. Encourage him/her to use the word in sentences too.
- Support him/her in understanding how the word relates to other words, concepts and ideas – use mind maps to show these links.
- Review his/her understanding of new vocabulary regularly.

## Advice for support staff and subject teachers

- **Do not assume knowledge of words** – his/her knowledge of extended vocabulary may be weak. There are many words used by mature language users which are classified as ‘**extended vocabulary**’. **These are words which are used extend a more simple idea** for example, glimpse (look quickly), scrutinise (look in a detailed or in-depth way), radiant (bright), examine (to look at closely), precious (important, dear to you), ordinary (plain), cautious (careful). It is assumed at secondary school that children will know or have had some exposure to these words and therefore they are rarely taught or explained. **Be aware of the need to check his/her understanding when such words are used to explain an idea.**
- **Encourage him/her to identify words in text which he/she does not understand**, as, unless he/she learns to question her understanding, he/she is likely to make mistakes because of misinterpretations. **Encourage him/her to use a book to record new words and their definitions so that the words can be reviewed regularly.**

- **Making Semantic Links – prior to introducing a new topic, investigate her prior knowledge of the topic using a concept map or word web.** This helps to gauge understanding of the concepts and words involved and investigate the semantic connections he has made between the words and concepts associated with the topic.
- **Pre and post teaching vocabulary** – studies show that students who experience difficulties with word learning benefit from having access to topic words prior to the lesson in which they are introduced. Pre-teaching and reviewing vocabulary regularly are strategies which would benefit her greatly. Provide vocabulary lists to parents prior to the topic being introduced.
- He/she may not recognise or understand the meaning of a word you've said even though he/she may have heard it before; **Ask questions to check the vocabulary has been understood; Rephrase what you've said using familiar words.**
- **He/she may confuse words that are similar in meaning;** Ask questions to check the vocabulary has been understood; Rephrase what you've said using familiar words. **Teach clear definitions of words, making links to the relevant context to reflect the meaning of the word.**
- **He/she may confuse words that are similar sounding** i.e. conversation, conservation; Ask questions to check the vocabulary has been understood. Draw attention to the sound structure of the words and how they are the same and different. Break down the word into syllables and phonemes and practise saying the words and defining what they mean.
- Support the learning of new words with visual cues – use pictures, mind maps, photographs, diagrams, flow charts, symbols and gesture to give additional information about the meaning of words.

#### **To encourage independent learning skills**

- Encourage 'Active Listening Skills' – support the student in taking responsibility for his/her own listening and attention skills. Ask him/her to share/explain what he/she finds challenging about listening/understanding and to plan together how best to support him/her.
- Support him/her in developing the confidence to ask for clarification
- Encourage the use of strategies such as asking for repetition, asking for complex words to be explained and asking to a task to be broken down into steps.

Ann Forrester, Speech & Language Therapy – August 2016

**David Haley**  
**Director of Children's Services**