

Adapting adult language

Children with difficulties learning language benefit from adults adapting the way they speak. Try some of these strategies:

- Listen more than you talk
- Simplify the message – reduce the amount you say and use simple words
- Slow your rate of speech and pause frequently
- Repeat what you've said using exactly the same words, but emphasizing the key words
- Don't be afraid of silence (count to 10 before you say something else) – it gives children time to think.
- Wait for children to initiate communication or respond to what you say. This may just be eye contact.
- Comment on what they are doing (instead of asking them questions).
e.g. Instead of 'What's that?', say "ooh, that looks nice!"
- Expand/add to what they say – this means repeating what they've said and adding another idea or another 1-2 words.
e.g. child says 'car'; you say 'red car' or 'fast car', 'car on the road'.
- Adapt your language to the child's level – if the child only understands 3 key words, your sentences should contain just 3 key words.
- Gain their attention before speaking; say their names often in an activity
- Use lots of visual or other sensory cues to support spoken language – signing or gesture can help
- Find out from home what's been happening so that you can have a conversation with the child more easily (a home-school book can be useful for this). Ask specific questions e.g. "Did you play in the sand?" Then make general relevant comments, e.g. "You can hide things under the sand." And wait and see what they say in reply.

Share the strategies that work best with other adults around the child.

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