

TALK Understanding

Guidance for Early Years Professionals



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The aim of this booklet is to provide information and advice to Early Years Professionals in Halton who would like to know more about supporting a child's Speech, Language and Communication.

Introduction

Being able to understand is an important part of any child's speech and language development. When children are very young they learn the concrete aspects of the world they see around them, and then gradually learn to understand concepts outside of the 'here and now'.

Being able to understand is key to understanding language, we need language for all aspects of our life.

What's that?

Receptive Language

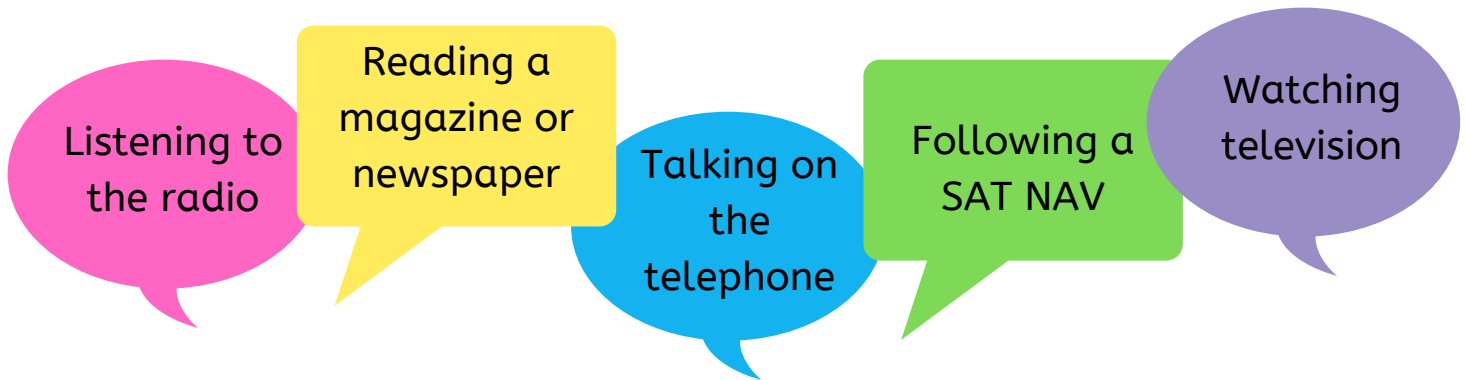
Understanding

Comprehension

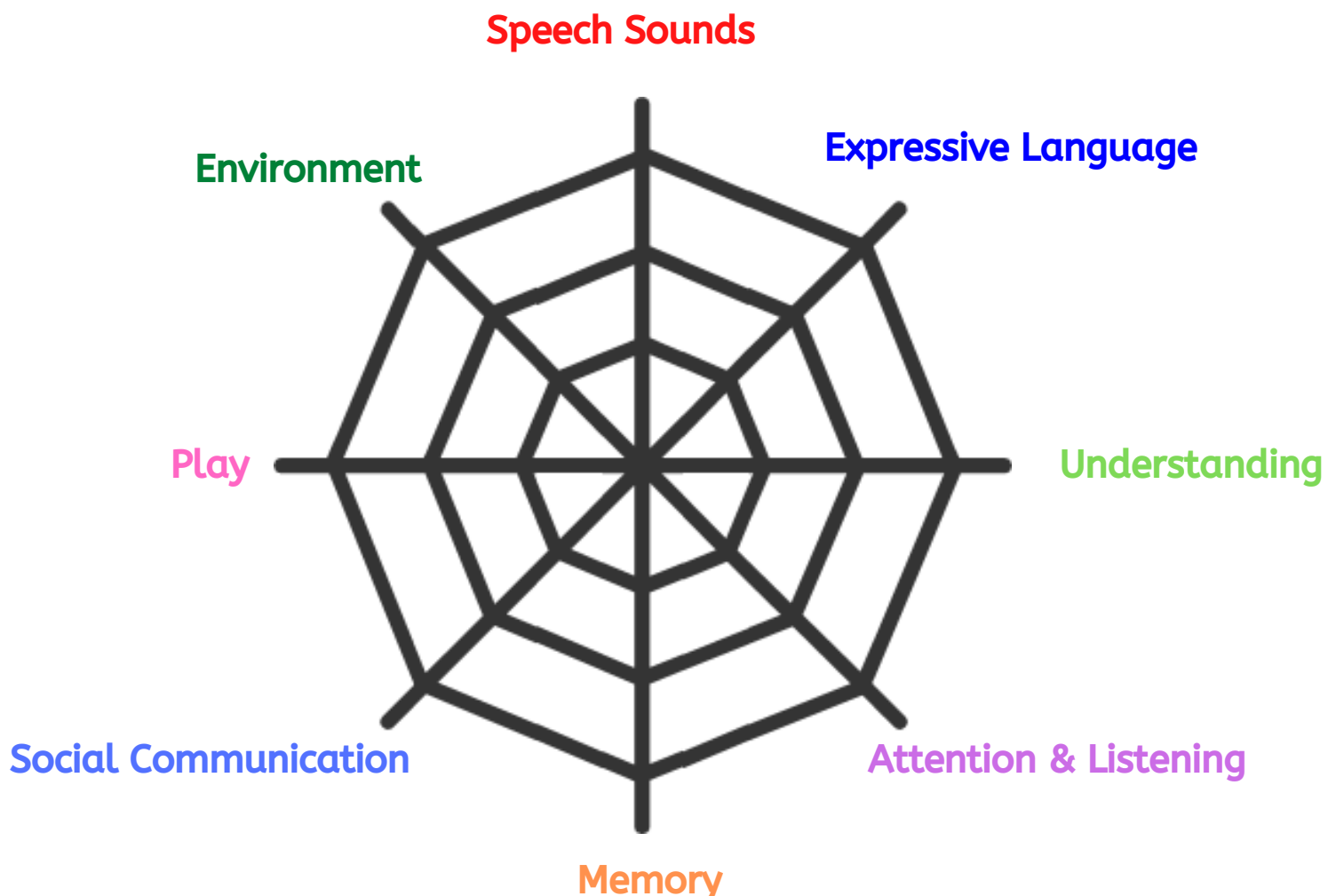
Auditory Comprehension

The ability to understand and comprehend spoken language that you hear or read.

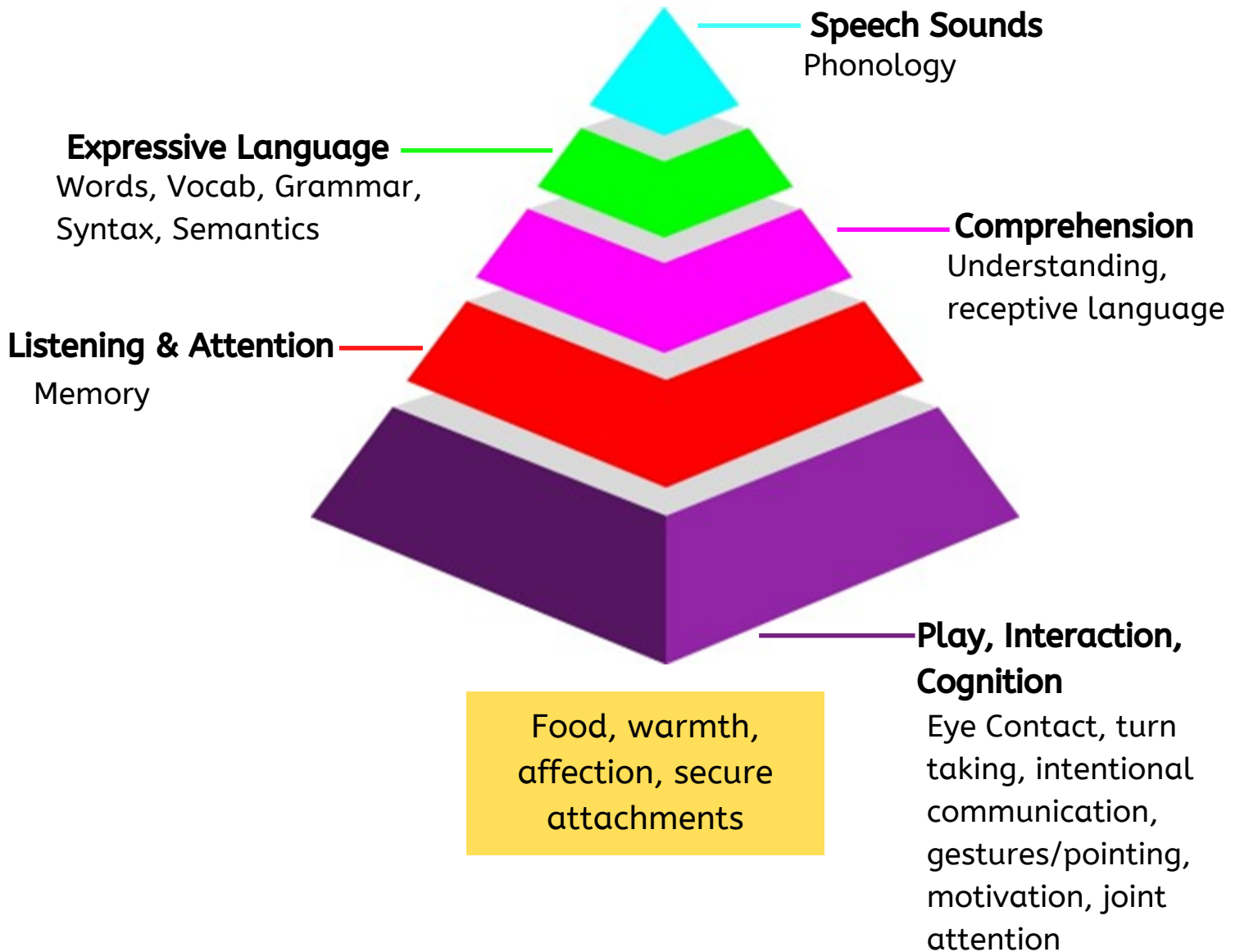
Take a moment to think about your typical day. Consider the different times throughout your day when you need to have understanding of language.



Comprehension is part of a wider inter-connected communication system



Communication Pyramid



Comprehension is a **VITAL** part of our complex communication system.

We need good understanding to do EVERYTHING!

A difficulty in this area has a big impact on other parts of the communication system and our daily lives.

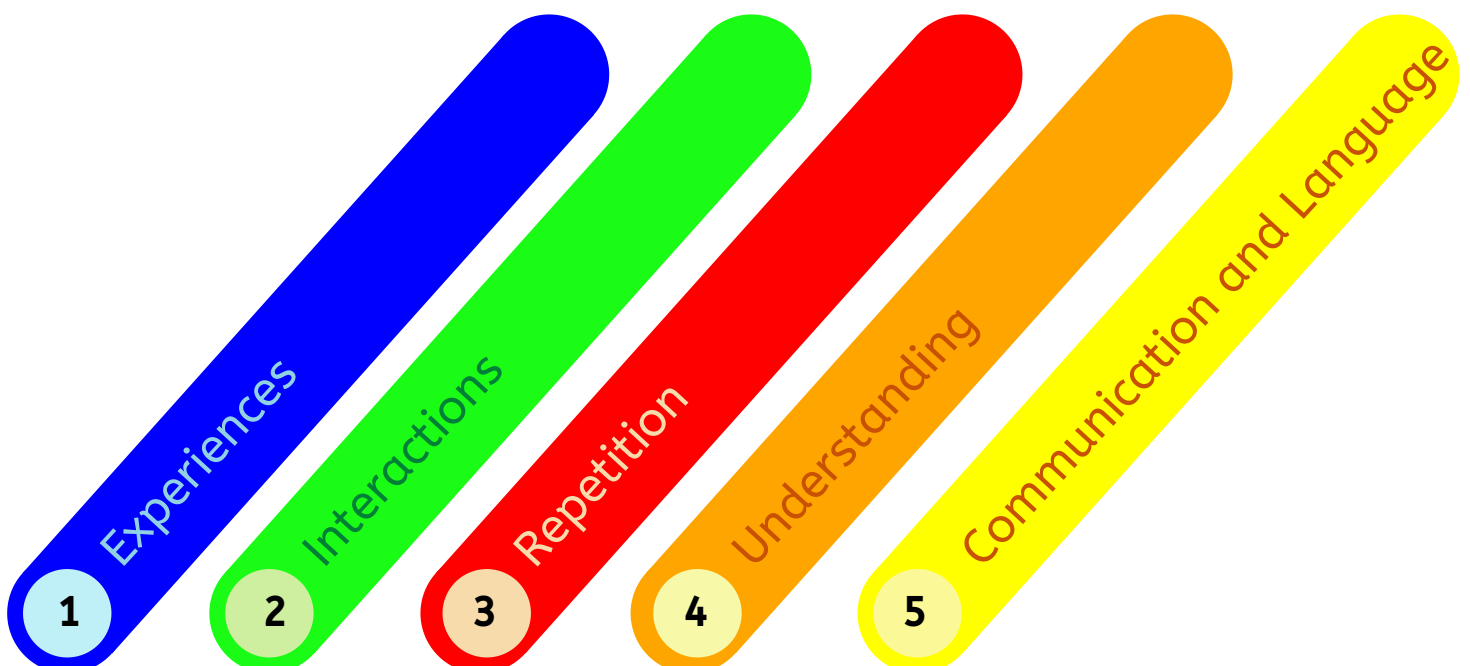
Situational Understanding

Children can often seem to understand instructions without having to actually know **ANY** words at all, this is because they are understanding the routine/situation that they have experienced lots of times before rather than the language.

"Stop what you're doing and come and sit on the red carpet please"

"Get your coat on and find your shoes, we're going to the shops"

Recap of Language Development



Typical Development

0-8 months DISCOVERER	• Pre-verbal • Pre-intentional • Situational understanding • Understands conversation noises, intonation and gestures • Object Permanence
9-13 months COMMUNICATOR	• Actions, social situations, gestures, intonation some words in situations they have experienced before • Responds to own name • Cause and Effect (important for later verbal reasoning)
12-18 months FIRST WORD USERS	• One key word – even without visual cues • Names of familiar objects and people • Starts to understand body parts
18-24 months COMBINERS	• 2 key words • Simple instructions (without situation clues) ‘kiss teddy’ • Pictures in books ‘show me the lion’ • Simple questions ‘where’s your blanket?’
2-3 years EARLY SENTENCE USER	• 2 and 3 part instructions near to 3 years • Early concepts developing from: big/little to: colours, in /on
3-5 years LATER SENTENCE USER	• 3 part instructions, leading to complex 4+ part instructions • Later concepts – under/behind /in front, before/after/later, Why and because

Concepts are words that are hard to describe. Concepts help children to understand direction, position, location, number, quantity, sequence, attributes, dimension, size and also similarities and differences.

EARLY CONCEPTS

- Size: big, little
- Position: in, on under
- Colour: red, yellow, blue, pink,
- Time: now

LATER CONCEPTS

- Size: bigger, biggest, massive etc..
- Position: behind, in front, next to, between
- Colour: silver, indigo, light green, etc..
- Time: before, after, later, soon, yesterday
- Number: first, last, some, lots, counting

It is important to have a good understanding of different concepts in order for children to be able to follow instructions and to be specific about what they are talking about.

For children to use concepts in their spoken language, they must first have a good understanding about what these concepts are and what they mean.



Working on concepts

In the early years we need to be mindful of not trying to teach concepts at the wrong stage. We can model them ourselves in every day routines but should not try and **TEACH** them until the children are at the right developmental stage

Summary : Development of Comprehension

0-1 YEAR	• using babble and SINGLE WORDS • understanding situations and simple instructions
2-3 YEARS	• putting 2 WORDS together • understanding 2 key words/information carrying words (ICWs) in a sentence
3-4 YEARS	• putting 3 WORDS together • understanding 3 key words/information carrying words (ICWs) and CONCEPTS
4-5 YEARS	• putting 4 or more WORDS together, can use grammatical structures • understanding complex sentences with 4 or more key words/information carrying words (ICWs) and LATER CONCEPTS



Children can appear to understand language really well

However....

They may just be understanding the situation and not the words. They need to experience **A LOT** of situations with interactions to develop understanding.

We can use our developmental norms to help us know what they **SHOULD** be doing

Some words are harder to understand than others

Information Carrying Words (ICWs)

Expressive language

Number of words used in a sentence.

Receptive language

Number of words a child must understand in a sentence in order to follow it. Not the number of words in a sentence.

DON'T FORGET

Information Carrying Words (ICWs) are.....

- Number of choices in a phrase/ instruction
- Words that carry meaning.
- Essential words

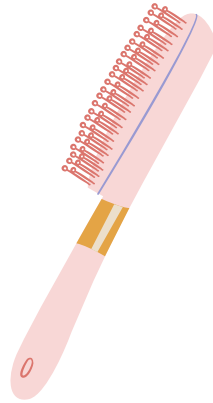
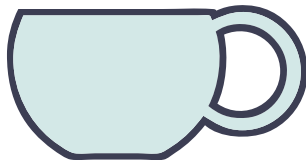
Understanding the principle of information carrying words can make us more aware of the linguistic demands placed on children.

Adults can therefore modify their language to support children more effectively and provide a good structure to support the development of communication skills.

Careful manipulation of ICWs can result in a gradual precise and measurable increase of language load.

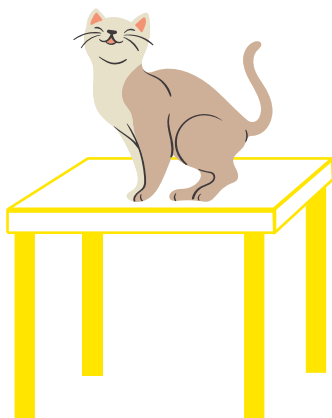


Information Carrying Words (ICWs)



Where is the **spoon**?

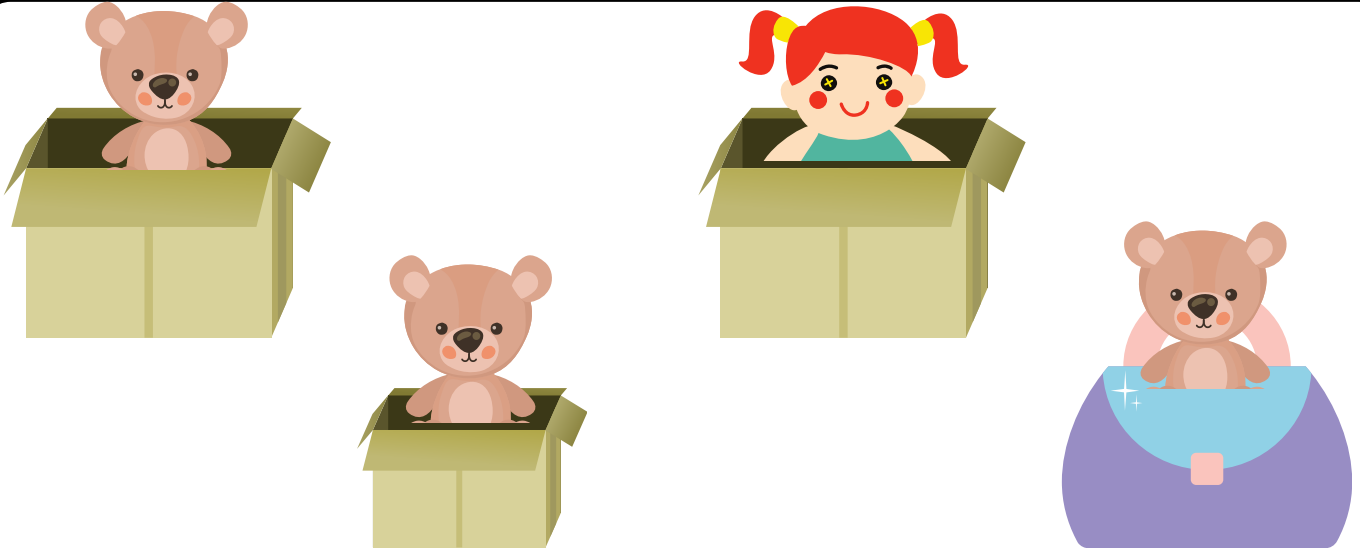
1 information carrying word



Show me the **ball on the table**

3 information carrying words

Information Carrying Words (ICWs)



Show me **teddy** in the **little box**

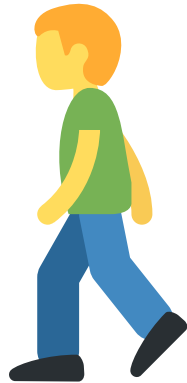
3 information carrying words



Where is the **shoe on the bed?**

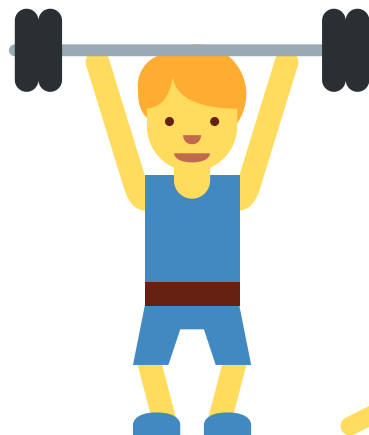
3 information carrying words

Information Carrying Words (ICWs)



Show me the **lady walking**

2 information carrying words



Who's **running?**

1 information carrying word

Information Carrying Words (ICWs)



Show me the girl

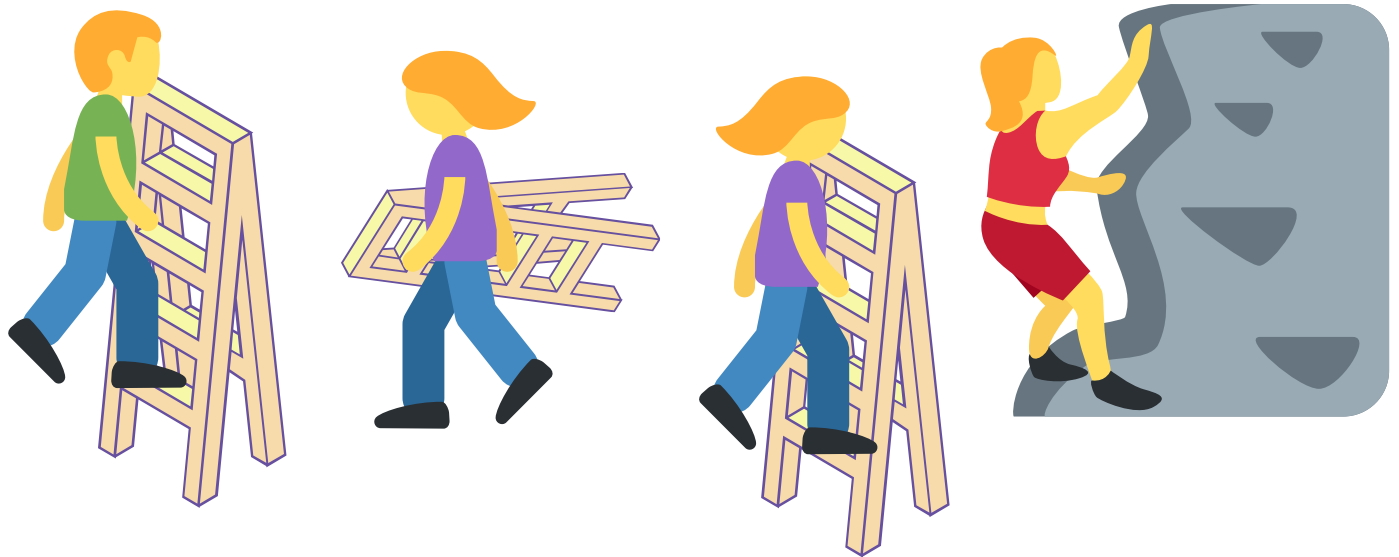
NO information carrying words



Who's got **no hat on?**

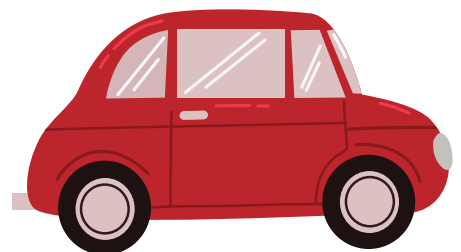
1 information carrying word

Information Carrying Words (ICWs)



Where's the **girl climbing** the **ladder**?

3 information carrying words



Show me the **big ball**

2 information carrying word

The following may indicate that a child is having difficulty understanding.

- Repeating back all or some of what you have just said (echolalia).
- Watching others in order to be able to follow instruction. Child may be a little bit behind the others (e.g. always the last one to sit on the carpet or laugh at a joke).
- Consistently in trouble for not following instructions – being in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing.
- Not following instructions given to a group of children but can understand them when given 1:1.
- Following part of an instruction.
- Looking blank when spoken to.
- Excessively smiling and giggling when asked a question/ given an instruction.
- Wrong/inappropriate responses to questions.
- Appears not to hear what you have said.
- Poor attention to language based activities.
- Passive, not joining in.
- Ignoring people when they have spoken.
- Frustration leading to inappropriate physical behaviour



Factors affecting comprehension

Factors that can affect comprehension

Auditory Memory	Exposure to vocabulary
Listening and Attention	Hearing
Learning ability (cognition)	Visual and auditory distractions
Internal distractions	The number and difficulty level of concepts in the instruction

DON'T FORGET

Having a difficulty understanding can make adults feel anxious, upset, frustrated, cross, confused and embarrassed.

It's hardly surprising that children may demonstrate some unwanted behaviours too.

Always check understanding if a child is very passive or acting out their frustrations in a physical way. They might be hiding a difficulty that is hard to spot.

REMEMBER!

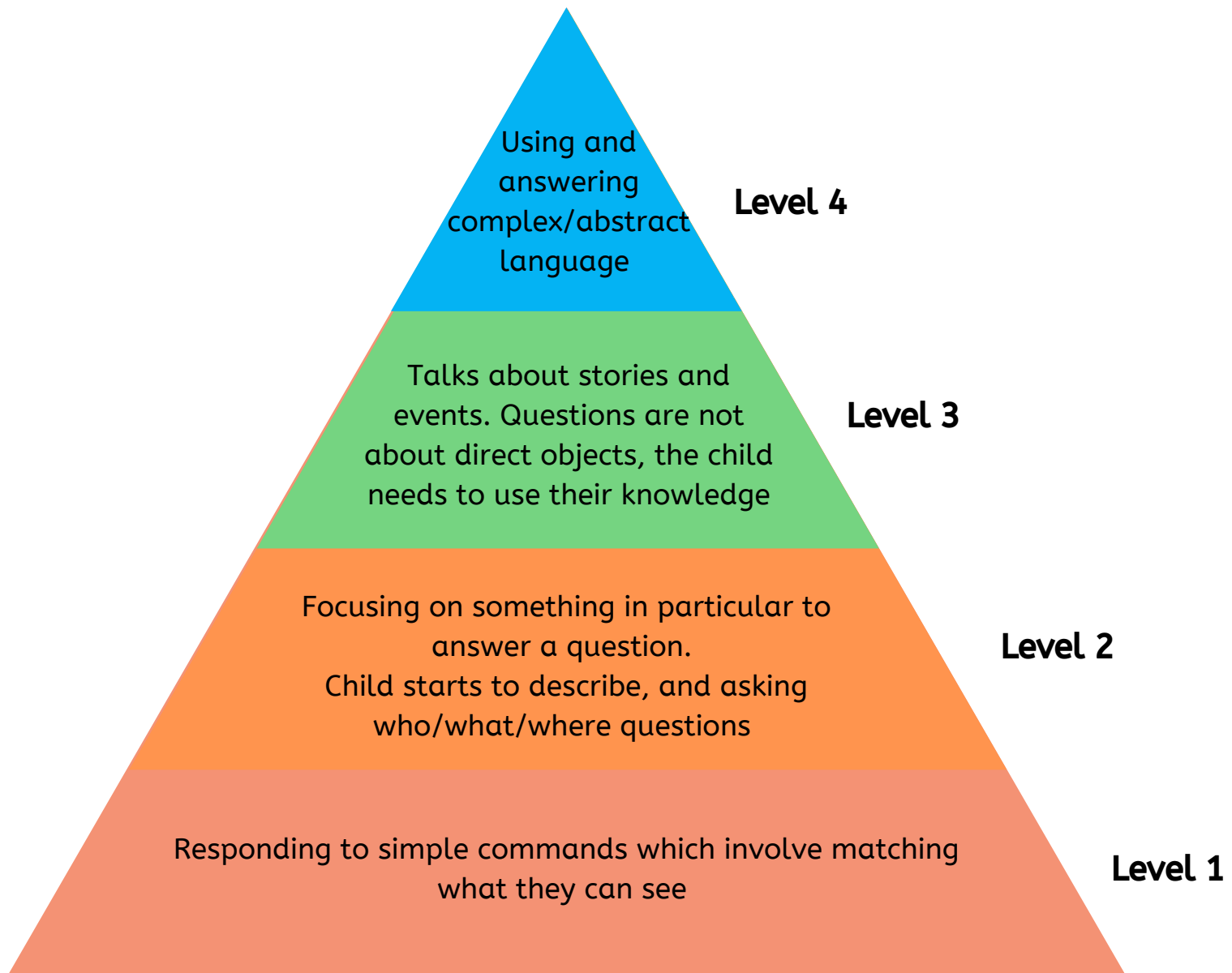
The environment and your language levels have an impact on what children can understand

Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978) created a questions framework which breaks down different types of questions into 4 achievable steps we call 'blank levels'.

Blank Levels can be used to outline the types of questions and instructions that can be used at varying levels of complexity and language demands.

Why use Blank Levels

- ★ To know the types of questions and directions a child understands and should be able to answer
- ★ To understand a child's verbal reasoning skills
- ★ To ensure realistic expectations of a child's comprehension
- ★ To help modify our language to make sure the questions we use are at an appropriate level for a child
- ★ To develop a child's verbal reasoning skills by working on the next level
- ★ To manage issues around behaviour more effectively



**60% of 3 year
olds understand
Level 1 and 2
questions**

**65% of 5 year
olds understand
Level 3 and 4
questions**

Blank Levels: example questions

L 4

What do we
need to___?
Why will the___?
How can we tell___?
What could we do if___?
Why can't we___?

L 3

What does ___ mean?
How does___feel?
Tell me how to...
What might happen next?
What could s/he say?

L 2

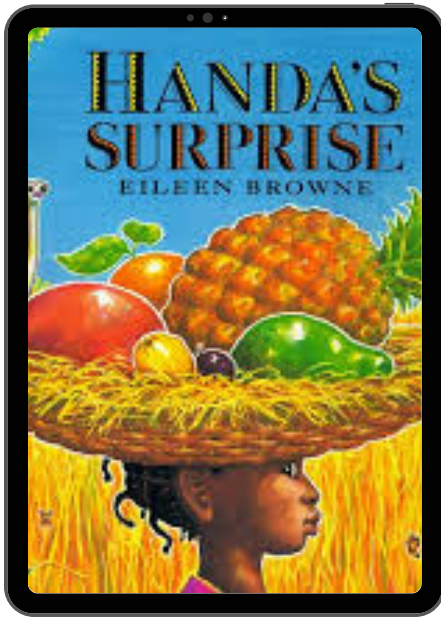
Find a big ___ What is happening?
What's it for? What goes with a___?
Who did what..? Tell me something that is a type of___. How
are they different?

L 1

Where are the...?
What's this? What can you hear? Who's this?



Blank Levels: Practical Example



L 4

What
could you do
if someone stole
your banana?
How can we tell the
monkey is happy?

L 3

What might Handa say to the monkey?
What might happen next?
How does the monkey feel?

L 2

Find a yellow fruit
What other fruits do we eat?
Show me something that is flying

L 1

Point to the monkey
What's this?



Blank Levels: Practical Example



**Homecorner
Roleplay Area**

L 4

Teddy feels
ill. Why do you
think teddy
feels ill?

L 3

Give teddy a drink and
then give dolly some cake

L 2

What do we cut with?
What other food can we have to eat?
Find me a big plate
Teddy is eating cake and dolly is eating strawberries. Who
is eating cake?

L 1

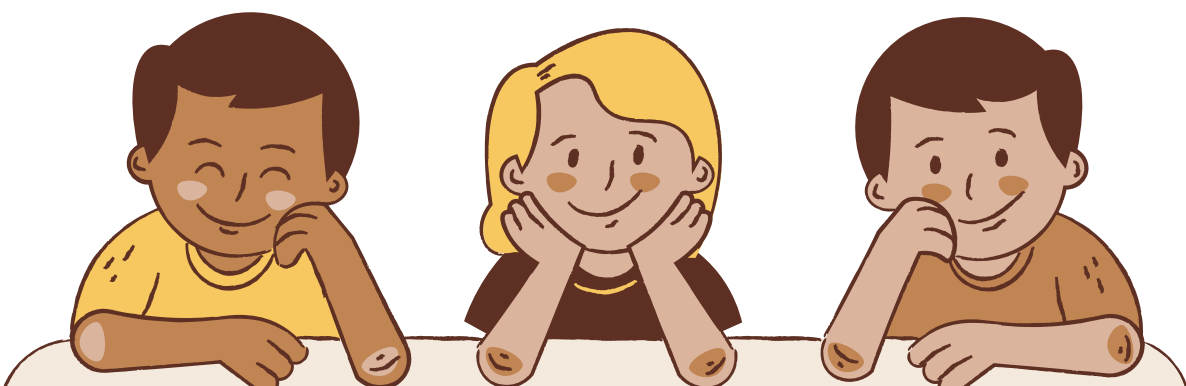
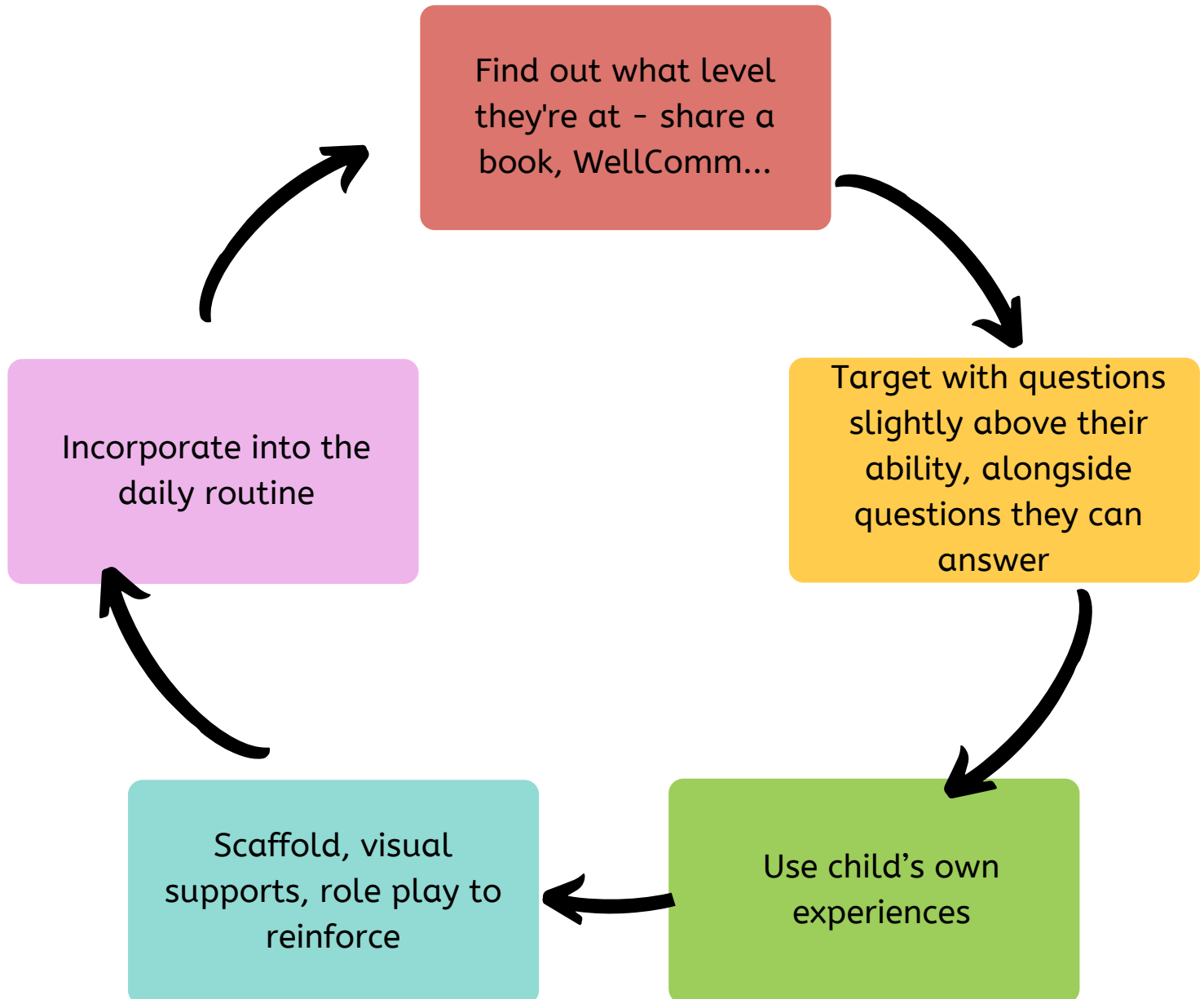
What is this?
Find a cup
Find another one like this
Where is the teapot?



Blank Levels and WellComm

WellComm Section	WellComm Screening Question	Blank Level
Section 4	'Give me the plate and ball'	Level 1
	'Where is the broken cup'	Level 2
Section 5	"Where do we eat dinner? "	Level 2
	'What do you do with a pencil'	Level 2
	'The frog is sitting...'	Level 2
Section 6	"Can you think of something that flies?	Level 3
	'Why is the little girl crying?	Level 4
Section 7	"Why do we wash our body? (<i>more abstract why question</i>)	Level 4
	"This girl is sad because she dropped her ice cream"	Level 4
Section 9	"Mummy says 'get your skates on' who is she talking about?	Level 4
	'It's Sam's birthday and he has a birthday cake. What will he do next?	Level 3

Main points for supporting Blank Levels



Strategies to support children to answer questions

Ensure questions are at child's level

Give the child sufficient time (10 seconds) to think and give answer

Provide first sound or syllable of the answer

Use gesture to help the child understand or to cue them in to the correct answer.

Repeat the question if needed

Use sentence completion cue (e.g. what animal is this? It's a...)

Use visual supports to aid understanding

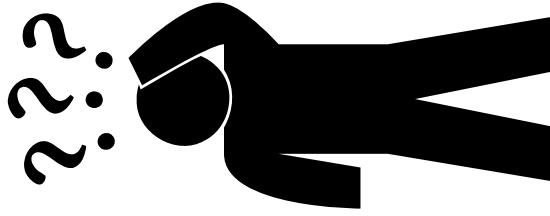
Simplify the questions by breaking it down into parts

Relate answers back to child's previous experiences



Levels of Questions: Getting them right

Abstract



Level 1
(2 - 3yrs)

**Simple commands in
the here and now**

"Point to..."
"Show me..."

"Is this a..."
"Find the..."

"Find one like this"
"What's this?"
"What is...doing"

Level 2
(3 - 4yrs)

**Listening for details
in the here and now**

"Where..?"
"Who..?"

"Which one is...(big/blue/soft/etc?"
"What does it do?"
"What is it for?"

Level 3
(4 - 5yrs)

**Beyond the here and
now: Making links**

"Tell me how to..?"
"Naming something that is not a..."
"What might happen next?"

"How do you feel when...?"

Level 4
5+yrs)

**Analysing, Explaining
and Reasoning**

"How do you know?"
"What made...happen?"
"What would you do if...?"
"How are they different?"
"Why..?"

Concrete

Using Visual Supports

Visual supports are an **ESSENTIAL** part of your Early Years toolkit when

- Developing understanding
- Supporting children who struggle with understanding



Why use visual supports?

Visual supports make the unpredictable predictable

Children can **SEE** what you are saying

Visual supports help with:

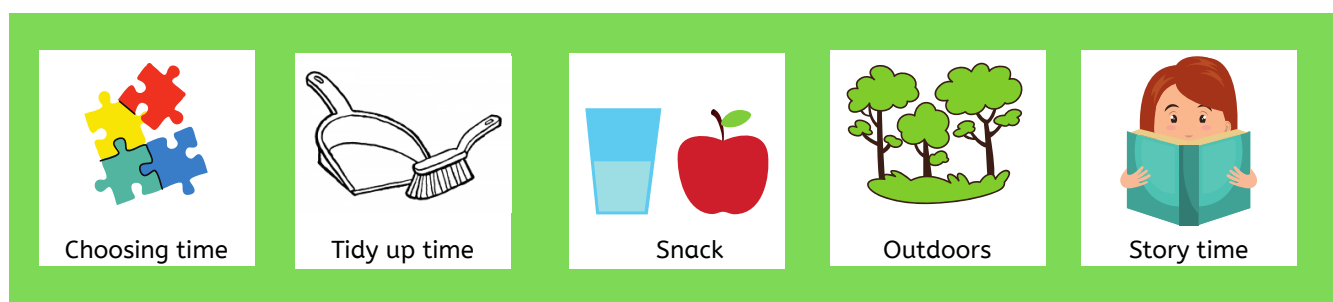
- Choices
- Behaviour expectations
- Knowing what's going to happen
- How to do things independently
- Difficult situations
- Changes to routines
- Unexpected events



Visual Supports

A **visual timetable** is a sequence of symbols, pictures or photographs that represent activities to show children the likely routine throughout the session.

The visual images are usually displayed in a linear fashion, either vertically or horizontally.

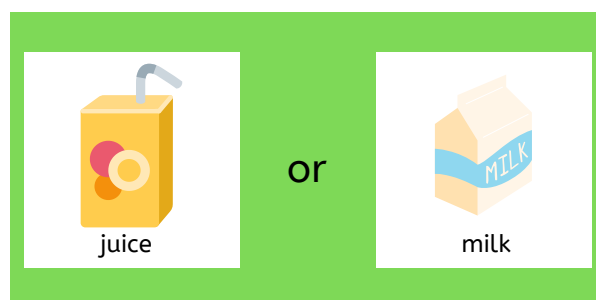


Visual timetables can be used for individual children or whole groups. They can benefit all children as they know what to expect.

Visual schedules are a sequence of pictures/photographs that break the activity down into smaller steps (e.g. washing hands).

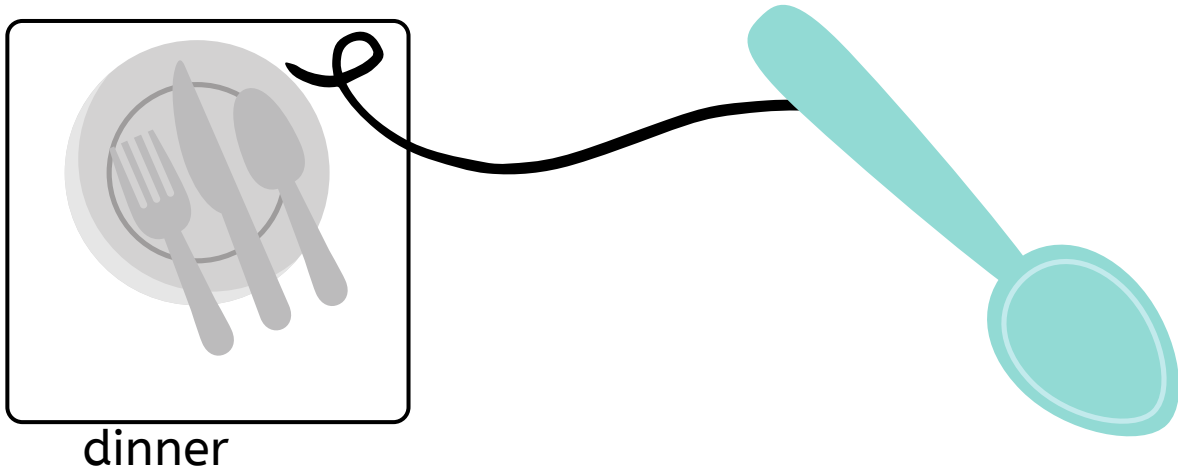


A **'Choice Board'** is made up of photographs/symbols showing the choice of toys and resources available. 'Choice Boards' can benefit all children. Look for opportunities to present choice in every teaching routine.

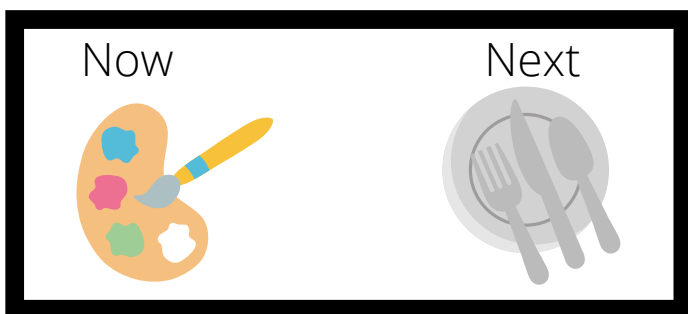


Visual Supports

Objects of Reference are objects that are used to communicate meaning in the same way as words and pictures. They can be used to represent anything we want to communicate: people, places, activities, events, etc. For example, a spoon to convey the message that it is time for dinner.



Use **Objects of Reference** when children are not able to understand pictures to help make choices, understand routines and join in.



Use '**Now and Next boards**' to increase the child's involvement and build their confidence.

Once the child is confidently using the 'Now and Next Board' you may wish to introduce a 'Now, Next and Later Board'.

Visual cards on a key ring or lanyard enable you to show a child a picture/ photograph to support their understanding



Strategies

Please refer to the following
EYFS Pack: Foundations for
Understanding and EYFS
Pack: Language and
Listening. If you do not have
copies of the packs please
contact



Foundations for Understanding



- Speech and Language
Therapy Resource Pack -

- To develop attention and
listening skills -

Language and Listening



- Speech and Language
Therapy Resource Pack -

- To develop attention and
listening skills -

LISTENING

Lola the Listening Leopard

- Try to sit still
- Try to be quiet
- Look at the person talking
- Remember what has been said



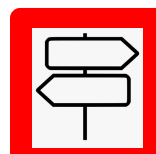
NARRATIVE THERAPY



When



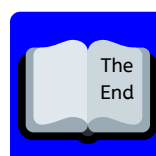
Who



Where



What happened



The End



Child takes all of the items out one at a time and name together. Then tidy up..
Let's put away the...
Start with 1 item, then 2, then 3 or more!

Let's find the puzzle pieces!
Can you find me the.. plane
The plane and car....
The plane, car and helicopter

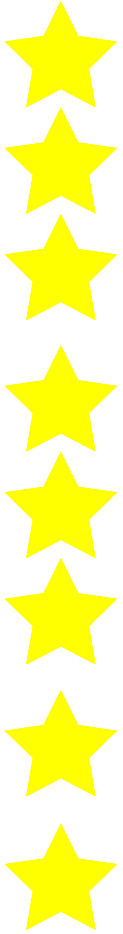


You can do this with shape sorters, post boxes, fishing games and so on...

OR find things around the home/EY environment e.g.
“can you find a spoon, a hat and a ball”

- Ideas to support understanding at **EVERY** level
- Activities to support difficulties and offer stretch/challenge
- Activities for Listening and Attention
- Can be done in small groups, individually or integrated into daily activities
- Can be shared with parents/carers/childminders, etc..





Say child's name to gain attention before giving an instruction

Be aware of background noise and visual distractions

REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT

REPEAT info given to a group individually

Chunk language into smaller units

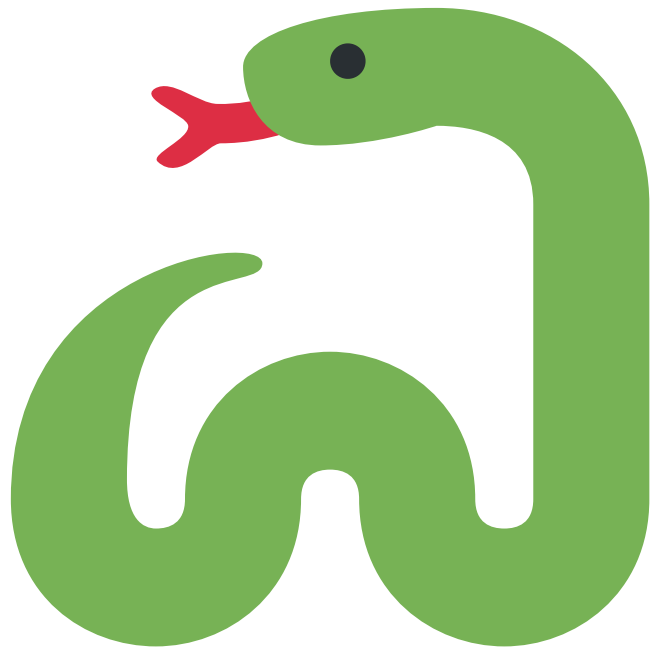
Put the most important bit at the end

Simplify – reduce number of words, easier vocab and reduce complexity of structure

WAIT !!! Processing language is tricky, give time to respond

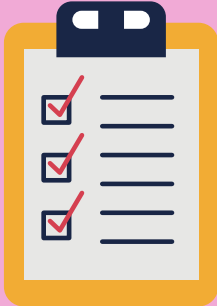
Remember the 4 S

- Say LESS
- Stress - emphasize
- SLOW
- Show



Top Tips

Top Tips for supporting children to develop higher level understanding



What to do...

- Use **STRETCHING** vocabulary
- **ADD** an **IDEA** to what they say
- Increase the number of ICWs you use
- Move to a higher Blank Level



Play ...



- Verbal memory games
“I went to the shop and I bought”...
- Use categories “ I went to the zoo and I saw”
- Songs that have a memory element (e.g. Head Shoulders Knees and Toes, One finger one thumb keep moving, The Music Man

Role of the EY Practitioner



- Assess: Wellcomm
- Observe
- Support strategies
- Interventions
- Stretch and Challenge
- Seek advice
- Share with parents
- Collaborate



- Wait and see/ do nothing
- Offer your personal opinion