



Receptive Language

The term receptive language is used to describe how much somebody understands. Detailed below are suggested strategies, interventions and games to support the development of receptive language skills.

General Strategies: Helping a Child to Understand Language

- Use short sentences with simple vocabulary.
- Modify your language:
 - Slow down your speech rate
 - Pause, repeat and summarise
 - Be ready to use simpler words or a visual cue to explain something e.g. “The hare started swiftly” could be rephrased “this one (pointing to the hare) ran very fast”.
 - Offer a choice of responses e.g. “was the hare fast or slow?”
- If the child hasn’t understood what you’ve said, think about why they failed....
 - Sentence too long or grammatically complex?
 - New vocabulary?
 - Words had more than one meaning (synonyms)?
 - Too many concepts in one sentence?
 - Concepts used were too abstract?
 - Child wasn’t paying attention / hadn’t listened accurately?
- Wherever possible, always summarise and recap. Relate your explanations to the child’s own experiences.
- Keep all language concrete and relevant to the task in hand. If ambiguous language is used, the child may need the meaning to be explained.
 - Encourage the child to ask for help and to tell somebody if they have not understood
 - Ensure all who interact with the child are aware of the child’s difficulties

Suggested Games/Activities

Vocabulary: When learning new words, it is important to attach as much information about the word as possible. This ensures that the word is stored securely and can be retrieved easily. The table below can be copied and used to help a child learn the meaning of a new word. Encourage the child to write/draw about the object in each section.



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What is it made of?	What shape and size is it?
What sound does it start with?	Where would you find it?
What is it a type of?	What do you do with it?
What does it feel like?	What colour is it?

Concepts: It is important to remember when developing understanding of language (particularly concept development) that it is easier for all children to learn if the activities are real and relevant to them. If they do not relate to what you are talking about then they are less likely to understand and remember what you have taught them.

Pictures can be quite abstract and should be the 'last resort' as a method of teaching, whereas using the child themselves, real objects or daily routines & activities are much more 'real' and therefore more likely to result in change (language understanding developing).

The following examples are meant only as a guide to stimulate ideas on how to develop understanding of language concepts when the need has been identified.

Always make sure you consider both parts of the concepts as a child will learn one before the other i.e. they will usually learn 'first' before 'last' and 'same' before 'different'. Always use as a multi-sensory approach to reinforce the concepts. This will help the child to generalise what he or she has learnt rather than learn the concept within one context only. It is best to teach ONE concept at a time e.g. teach 'little vs. not little' before introducing big.



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N.B: It is important to remember that when you are developing a child's understanding of a concept you are effectively teaching it. Sometimes we remain in assessing mode when we need to teach so be aware of this when you are working.

Little / Big: Set up play situations where the child has big and little versions of toys to play with. Provide a running commentary i.e. If playing with a big and little doll and a dolls house, talk about the big doll and what she is doing.

Hot / Cold: When you talk about the weather outside, talk about whether it is hot or cold today. Remember you are teaching them so it is ok to tell them which it is and let them experience it. The more the child experiences things for him/herself the more they will learn and the easier it will be for them.

Down / Up: This is where you would use the child's knowledge to support them to learn about down / up. When an aeroplane is flying overhead encourage them to look up at the sky to see the aeroplane or down at the floor to see what they have dropped. You could also talk about going up or down when you are going up & down steps / stairs or a slide etc.

On / Off: Ask the child to stand on a small step and then ask them to jump off, and then repeat. If a child becomes too hot and takes off their jumper use the opportunity to reinforce the concept and if too cold and they put on their jumper talk about what they are doing. When getting on play equipment i.e. bike's, trucks etc. talk about what they are doing.