**Activities to help understanding**

**For Parents**

Children have to know what words mean, learn a big vocabulary and understand words before they can use them.

If a child does not understand a word they may have difficulties with:

* Following instructions/commands
* Understanding what is said to them
* Using the words to talk, so talking maybe delayed

It is crucial that we identify when children do not understand certain words, know how to help children learn new words, use simple words and short sentences to help children comprehend what we say.

* Start with simple words
* Name everyday objects as often as you can, across environments e.g. supermarket, home, park etc
* Sorting and tidying up gives opportunities to name objects and group them together e.g. lion, spoon, elephant, ball, fork, block- you could sort into animals, things we eat with and toys.
* When they have learnt to name start asking them about parts of the object so they can begin to label features and functions
* Start to emphasise the development of verbs (doing words)- talk about what they are doing.
* You can talk about objects using, real objects, pictures, symbol pictures.
* Then highlight words that are more abstract e.g. **big** dog, **red** ball, **some** food- these words help describe objects/other words

**Activities that develop understanding**

Children usually start to learn about describing words when they are 2½ - 3 years old or when they are talking in short phrases and can understand short sentences and directions. To check whether your child is ready to start thinking about describing words, put 6 objects in front of your child and ask your child to give you two of them. If your child cannot do this they are probably not ready to learn about describing words

If your child is ready for describing words:

• Start by using some simple describing words

• Talk about one or two describing words at a time. Focus on two words for a week.

• Use these words in everyday situations as well as during play.

• Find the describing words in pictures and books.

• Use the describing words with as many different things as you can.

• The following week choose another two words.

Children then have to be able to understand sentences, once they can understand words. Children must know the procedures about how sentences are formed and hear and understand what the word endings mean. By age 5 a child needs to be aware that sentences can have more than one implication.

If a child does not understand sentences they might:

• Withdraw, become quiet or misbehave because he cannot understand.

• Insist on routine and may dislike change because he doesn’t understand the explanations/reasons

• Be late talking and become very frustrated/irritated, perhaps having temper outbursts.

• Find it difficult to make friends and play with his peers.

We need to distinguish when children do not understand what we say and change the way we say things to help children understand.

**Understanding Questions**

Asking questions can help to develop a child’s language skills, but we must make sure that the questions we ask are understood by the child. Firstly, children need to understand who, what and where questions in their simplest form, secondly they will then understand when, why and how. Children have to learn to understand four different levels of questioning:

* Naming things
* Describing things
* Talking about stories and events –Retelling information
* Solving Problems-justifying things

Level 1- Naming things (simple/concrete information)

* Here the child is looking at the ‘whole’ object- what is it? (pointing)

Level 2- Describing things

* Answering who, what and where e.g. where’s the black cat?
* Giving other examples e.g. the cat is sleeping, what else do cats like to do?
* Listening to information and then answering who, what and where e.g. Henry was looking at the black cat. ‘Who was looking at the black cat?’

Level 3- Retelling information

* Talking about stories and events
* What happened?
* What did the cat say?
* What will happen next?
* How did he feel?
* Tell me what you did over the weekend

Level 4- Justifying things (complex/abstract information)

* Solving problems
* Making predictions ‘what could they do next?’
* Answering ‘why’ questions ‘why did the cat chase the mouse’

**\*60% of 3 year olds understand questions at level one and two and 65% of 5 year olds understand questions at level 3 and 4.**

You can help your child understand language, if the majority of your questions are at the correct level for the child.