



This NEPS Handout has been developed by educational psychologists and is based on current knowledge in this area. It is intended as a guide only. Not all the advice here may apply to any one student or situation. Teachers and parents may wish to identify the strategies that will work best for them.

Classroom Support for Children with Language Difficulties (Primary) Tips for Teachers

Children with language difficulties may have problems with expressive language (spoken words, articulation, word-finding, vocabulary, semantic confusions etc.) or with receptive language (understanding, recall etc.) or both. Their needs vary according to the nature and extent of their difficulties. The following guidelines, many of which will already be part of everyday classroom practice, are presented as suggestions that should be adapted and modified as appropriate. The aim is to highlight teacher behaviours that are especially helpful for children with language difficulties.

Behaviour

- Recognise that a lot of the student's behaviours may result from their language difficulties and that the student may not be intentionally difficult.

Seating

- It is important that children are seated in places where it is easy for them to attend, away from distractions such as doors and windows and close to the teacher.
- Sitting alongside others who attend and participate well provides positive peer influence and role models.

Asking for Help

- Children need to know that it is alright to ask for help, even if they are not sure how to phrase their questions. They should be encouraged to give a visual signal to let the teacher know if they are confused. Remember to praise the child for asking for help.

Sequencing

- Time concepts and sequences can be problematic. Today, yesterday, tomorrow, days of the week, months and seasons may be difficult to grasp and recall. Sequencing activities will be especially useful.
- Some children may have difficulty remembering the days and times of particular lessons/activities and will consequently often appear unprepared or confused. They should be encouraged to use visual timetables and personal checklists to improve their planning and organisation skills. Pictures with words are helpful.

Understanding

Giving Instruction

- Using individual children's names encourages concentration and participation.
- Get the child's attention before giving a general instruction to the class, e.g. preface the instructions by "listen" and establish eye contact with the child to make sure they are listening and/ or use the child's name.
- Information may need to be summarised, simplified or paraphrased.
- Directions should be broken down into steps
- Understanding of key words/phrases should be reviewed.
- Encourage the child to repeat an instruction back to you so you can be sure that he/she has understood.
- Give instructions in the order they should be done e.g. "Put on your coat, then go out to play" rather than "Before you go out to play, put on your coat".
- Provide visual cues to support verbal instructions e.g. books, pictures, modelling, gestures.
- Show/ demonstrate to the child, as well as explaining verbally.

"WH" Questions

- "WH" questions include what, when and why. They are useful for checking on a child's knowledge but used too often can appear threatening, because they put a child on the spot. Often they are not true questions as the child has experienced them at home. At home a parent asks a question because they do not know what the child wants e.g. "Do you want a drink?" but at school the questions are rarely genuine. The child knows that the teacher already knows the answer so, until they learn the rules of this new game, they may wonder why they are being asked.

Comprehension

- Understanding and remembering what is read can be problematic for children with language difficulties, even when they are skilled at decoding text. They should be encouraged to look back over text to support their comprehension and should be taught to identify and underline key-words.
- Encourage children to put into their own words what has been said, taught or read. This develops their understanding and memory.
- If a child appears to have difficulty understanding a particular phrase or sentence, for example, "Ann is as white as a sheet, she must be sick", then rephrase it, "Ann is very pale, she must be sick". Don't assume that these children understand such phrases.

Communicating

Expressive Communication

- Give extra time for the child to reply.
- Encourage the child to speak for him/her self (avoid letting other children talk for him/her).
- Make sure the child still needs to communicate (do not anticipate his or her needs).
- Use strategies to encourage the child to talk, e.g. working with one other child and an adult, talking about a familiar topic.
- Make it necessary for the child to make choices
- Use puppets. Children will often speak to or for a puppet more confidently.

Articulation and Phonological Difficulties

- If you do not understand what a child has said, ask the child to tell you another way or to show you.
- If you do not understand all that a child has said, repeat back the sentence to the point where you got lost. It is easier for the child to repeat a small chunk, rather than the whole sentence.
- Encourage the child and parent to record messages or significant events in a diary which is brought to school each day.
- Make use of technology, including iPads/ cameras and mobile phones with photos to allow the child to 'share' information/ experiences

Vocabulary

- When new class topics are introduced, children may need particular help with key vocabulary - in both spoken and written forms.
- Where possible, try to use pictures and concrete materials
- New vocabulary and concepts should be reviewed frequently
- Key words, concepts should be shared with parents for reinforcement at home, as appropriate.

Modelling

- The teacher gives many examples of the required behaviour/word etc. in the hope that the child will assimilate it and later produce it spontaneously.
- Talk about what the child is doing whilst he or she is doing it to provide a good model of language.

Expansion

- The teacher expands on what the child has said. E.g. if the child says “man drive” the teacher responds, “Yes, the man is driving” or “the man is driving a car”. The idea is that if later the child is asked “What’s happening?” they may produce a better response.

Offering Alternatives

- The child is given a choice of answer (within the question) to enable them to give some response.
E.g. “Is it a little brick or a big brick?”
“Do you want orange juice or milk?”

Repetition or Elicited Response

- The teacher models the required behaviour or response and asks the child to repeat it, perhaps after a delay. This may be useful when teaching new vocabulary.

Sentence Closure

- The teacher models a word or sentence and then tries to elicit it from the child by requiring the child to finish the sentence E.g. “I’m drinking tea, you’re drinking.....”

Open Questions

- Open questions and encouraging noises such as “Really ?” , “mmmmm?” “Tell me more about that...” often produce more response than a closed question (where there is usually a one word answer, such as Yes/ No).

Role Reversal

- The adult and child swap roles, so that the child has a turn to “be teacher”. Young children find this quite difficult at first. E.g. the teacher names a picture/object for the child to find and then the child asks the teacher to find another one.

