



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 Students with Language Difficulties (Post-Primary) Tips for Teachers**

Students 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 students 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 students 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**

- Encourage a feedback system where a student with language difficulties can indicate they are confused or do not fully understand. This can be done subtly through eye contact, a headshake or a card system. When difficulty is communicated, rephrase and restate, substitute words and simplify the grammar.

### **Sequencing**

- Students with language difficulties 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 class timetables and personal checklists to improve their planning and organisation skills. Visual or colour coded timetables can be very helpful.

### **Instruction**

- As students with language problems often have poor attention and listening skills, it is essential to double-check their grasp of important class instructions.
- Get the student's attention before giving a general instruction to the class, e.g. preface the instructions by saying "listen" and establish eye contact with the student to make sure they are listening
- Using individual student's names encourages concentration and participation.
- Information may need to be summarised, simplified or paraphrased.
- Keep instruction relatively short.

### **Vocabulary**

- When new topics are introduced, students with language difficulties may need particular help with key vocabulary - in both spoken and written forms. Where possible, try to use pictures and concrete materials.
- List key vocabulary on the board or give a handout and build a class discussion around key words.
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary in subject areas to students with language difficulties may also be helpful.

### **Comprehension**

- Check comprehension through questioning, repetition and synopsis.
- Allow extra time to process verbal questions that need to be answered orally. On occasion verbal questions could be presented to individual students before an oral session.
- Prime the student about what s/he will be asked. *I'm going to ask X, what factors he thinks caused the Irish famine, but first I am going to ask Y if he knows about any famines that happened in other parts of the world.*

### **Modelling**

- The teacher gives many examples of the required behaviour/word etc. in the hope that the student will assimilate it and later produce it spontaneously.

### **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).