



Understanding is important. If your child does not know what a word means, they will have difficulties following information given verbally. They will also have difficulties using the words they don't understand.

How to help your child understand words

- Use the same, simple words for items (for example, always use 'cup', rather than sometimes saying 'mug').
- Name objects every time your child picks something up or points at items. Comment on what they are doing by labelling it (e.g. "running"). Look at simple picture books together and name the actions and objects.



- Use gestures, body language and pointing as you speak to help your child understand.
- Talk about what people and animals are doing using short sentences of 2-3 words. Repeat the same sentence a few times if possible

How to help your child understand instructions

To be able to follow an instruction, your child will have to listen and understand the key words within a sentence. The number of key words your child can understand will increase as they get older. This loosely works in years, so at 1 year, we would expect your child to have an emerging understanding of 1 key word instructions, at 2 years, 2 key word instructions etc.

Keep instructions short and simple to make sure your child can understand you (e.g. chunk longer instructions into smaller ones).

Before you give an instruction, make sure your child is looking and listening to you.

One key word level:

If you have a choice of clothes in front of you (eg. hat, coat, scarf, boots) and said to your child "Where's the coat?" your child only has to understand the word 'coat' to pick up the right item of clothing to show you.



Two key word level:

If you had clothes from 2 children for example Leon's hat, coat, scarf, boots and Gemma's hat, coat, scarf, boots and said "Where's Leon's coat?", your child would have to understand two key words — 'Leon' and 'coat' to be able to show you the right item.

Three key word level:

At this level, your child will start to understand lots of different concepts, for example: big/little; in/on/under, colour. They will be able to follow more complicated instructions, such as:

Put the coat under the table; Give the big coat to the dolly.




For all of the underlined words, there should be alternatives (e.g. a big and small hat, and a teddy), so your child must be able to listen to and understand all 3 words to follow the instruction.

Visual Support

Objects, photos and pictures can help your child to understand words, as well as enable them to tell you what they want or about their ideas. As adults, we use visual support all the time to help us carry out everyday activities (e.g. reading a map or following an exit sign).



How to use Visual Support

- EVERYDAY OBJECTS** – Showing your child or pointing to an object (e.g. an apple as you say the word) to help them understand and build their knowledge of vocabulary. You can also use objects to show your child what is going to happen next (e.g. coat to show you are going outside).
 
- PHOTOGRAPHS** – Show your child pictures or photos of items you want them to get when you give them an instruction. Make a scrap book full of photos of family, outings, and favourite places to talk about with your child.
- PICTURES & SYMBOLS** – Can be used in the same way as photographs but understanding of these may need to be built over time and through repetition/ association.
- CHOICES** – Hold up two objects as you label them, to help your child express a preference by touching/saying the one they want, and to secure their understanding of what each object is.
- NATURAL GESTURE/SIGNING** – Using natural gestures or Makaton signs to emphasise your own spoken words (e.g. when you offer your child a drink, gesture having a drink yourself/when you ask your child if they want a story gesture a book opening).
- EXAMPLES** – If your child is struggling to understand what you want them to do, show them an example first or encourage them to watch a peer or sibling giving an example.
 
- VISUAL TIMETABLE** – Using a visual timetable in the form of a series of photos/symbols, at bedtime to help your child follow and understand a simple routine (e.g. pyjamas on, brush teeth and story time).
- REWARD/STAR CHARTS** – Using a star chart to give praise and reward when your child has shown positive behaviours.
 

Helpful tips:

- Think about what kind of visual support is going to be appropriate for your child's level of learning (e.g. some children will respond better to actual objects rather than more abstract line drawings or symbols).
- Make it meaningful for your child
- Remember visual support can be used anytime, anywhere, and is concrete, so it remains in situ, unlike verbal support