

ACTIVE LISTENING

ADVICE SHEET

Active listening

Teach Active Listening

Children, especially those with Language, communication and or Learning difficulties often need to be taught what to do when they do not understand.

Adults need to be aware of children who do not know when they have not understood. If a child does not know what they have not understood – how are they going to ask for help?

- Explain that it is GOOD to state when information is not understood
- Encourage a culture where asking relevant questions is viewed positively
- Sometimes children are expected to 'listen and do' not to 'question what I say'.
- Teach what to do and what to say when information is not understood

Asking for help may seem obvious however it is often the children who would benefit most from seeking support that are least likely to do so. Once the culture for requesting help is fostered, many children still either need to be directly taught or given models of how to seek help appropriately.

To teach a child to request help:

- Initially prompt the child by quietly going up to them and saying 'Do you want help?' If the child says 'Yes' find out what the issue is and then model what the child should do and say. For example, Josh explains that he can't remember what to do. The support needs to be ambiguous, and positive: 'Josh, if you want help, put your hand up. When I come say 'Mrs Jones I can't remember what to do?' Model this so the child can see or copy.
- After a while, stop modelling the response for the child to simply prompt by asking 'what do you say when you need help?.....'
- Gradually phase out the verbal prompt by going up to the child and just standing there, looking expectant and waiting for the child to ask for and state the help he needs. Only give a verbal prompt if necessary.

- Encourage the child not to say 'Mrs Jones I can't do it?' Encourage the child to identify and express the kind of help they need. Give accurate feedback so that the child can assess their progress towards being empowered to take responsibility for his own listening.

This can take a long time to achieve especially for a child with SLCN or Learning difficulties, but it is very important to adopt a whole school approach so that all the teaching staff are involved in empowering pupils.

Practise active listening in structured situations

Play 'Spot it'. Read a familiar story, but make silly mistakes e.g. give people/animals the wrong name, make them do silly things. Ask the children to put their hands up if they spot an error. Teach the children to identify the problem e.g. to ask 'what does balab mean?' Give constructive praise e.g. 'Good listening! You spotted the mistake and asked me what the word was'.

Once the children understand how to play 'Spot it' during a story, use this activity in other situations e.g. when giving information, directions or a plenary session. Warn them first though! Slip in a few words or words that are difficult to understand.

During other sessions, introduce other problems one at a time e.g. incomplete information, too much information, vocabulary that is too difficult.

You may need to teach the children phrases to use to identify the problem.

Aim for the children to accurately spot and identify the problem i.e. put their hand up and in answer to 'Yes Michael, what is the problem?'....'please say that more slowly.'

Once they can identify single problems warn them that you are going to use several types of 'spot it together' e.g. some difficult words and some incomplete information.

Barrier games

Set up situations which encourage the 'listener' to practise seeking support/clarification. A simple way of providing a barrier is to place a large book on its side between the partners. Another technique is for the learners to sit back to back.

Barrier games can encourage learners to develop speaking and listening skills within the context of a curriculum topic and are a great way of providing an opportunity for purposeful communication with learners who can provide good models of language, and therefore good for EAL language development.

Ideas:

1. Two timelines, each with something different missing. Two pupils have to ask each other questions to find the missing information and complete the timeline.
 2. Guess the shape/picture – child A describes shape/picture to child B who has to guess from the description.
- Each player has an identical set of materials and background scenes. One player places an item or object onto their scene, giving specific and detailed verbal instructions to the other player about what object they are placing, where they are placing it, and how they are placing it. The opposite player listens carefully and attempts to place the same object in the exact same place on their landscape or scene using only the verbal instructions that they were given (they are also allowed to ask questions for clarification). Repeat the two above steps until all items are placed. Then remove the barrier and compare.



Visual support strategy – Red card, green card

For a child who is reluctant to request support verbally -place a card, which is red one side, and green the other in front of each child. The child shows green for 'go' (I can do this) if he understands the task or red for 'stop' (I can't do this, I need help.)

Consider using cards on a key ring and adding a third, amber card for 'I'm having a go!'

If a child has indicated they need help by showing a red card, they should be encouraged to say what help they want rather than the supporting adult making the decision and giving the child the support they think is needed.

Alternatively, symbols can be used.

Providing the child with the language to seek help

Language for Strategies

If a strategy is taught, e.g. mnemonic, a word map etc. it is important to name the strategy and teach what it is called. This gives everyone in the class the language to talk about things that help them to learn.

When a new strategy is introduced, ask the children to vote – did that help or not?

Practise choosing strategies, for example, if a new word is introduced, ask the children what strategy they could use to help them to remember it. Demonstrate that it is OK if children use different strategies – in fact, this is good.

Skills need to be used in a variety of situations to help generalise the learning. Encourage pupils to actively seek support in everyday situations. All adults to be encouraged to wait for pupil to ask for help.