

## Language Difficulties Explained

This resource explains the impact language difficulties have on classroom performance. The tables below will help you to identify the area of difficulty and explain why a child may find certain tasks hard. It is important to remember that every child will have a slightly different pattern of difficulties and not every child will have all the behaviours or problems listed.

Listening And Attention		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
Problems gaining knowledge. Lack of performance monitoring. Difficulty with social interaction. Confusion when following instructions or completing tasks Weak vocabulary skills.	Poor knowledge of how the worlds works leading to child being vulnerable.  Poorly developed learning strategies.  May be isolated or need help making friends.  Needs repetition of instructions.  Lengthy tasks and instructions will be hard.  May need help with narrative skills.	Gain child's attention by using name and ensuring the child is looking at you.  Sit the child in front of the speaker.  Work on the rules for good listening.  Teach the child to work out what is important in a message, i.e. listen for stress key words, etc.  Use short tasks and change activity frequently to maintain success.  Give instructions one at a time and check for understanding.  Use lots of repetition and encourage the child to ask for repetition.  Use visual prompts where possible, e.g. when reading a story to the class use props and pictures to maintain attention levels.

## Auditory Memory – short term memory for what you hear

Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Difficulty understanding spoken language.                      Poor reading comprehension.                      Poor sequencing skills for ordering information, instructions or parts of a task.                      Difficulty following grammatical rules.                      Difficulty learning new words and building up a broad vocabulary.                      Poor recall of events.                      Weak verbal reasoning skills.</p>	<p>Frequently 'forgets' instructions and tasks or only completes part of instruction or task.</p> <p>Unable to retain the content of a story resulting in poor deductive skills as unable to retain all the relevant information.</p> <p>Loses track when reading. Finds pronouns particularly difficult to follow.</p> <p>May have very disorganised spoken and written language. May find it hard to apply rules of grammar and confuse order of events.</p> <p>Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.</p> <p>Tasks requiring problem solving may be difficult. May be very literal.</p> <p>May find it hard to learn rote sequences of information, e.g. alphabet, days, months...</p> <p>May be unable to retain sounds for blending which can lead to speech, reading and spelling difficulties.</p>	<p>Try to use short simple sentences and back these up with visual cues where possible.</p> <p>Avoid giving long list of instructions or information in one go.</p> <p>Give instructions one at a time and check for understanding at each stage before giving the next part.</p> <p>Use lots of repetition and encourage the child to ask for repetition.</p> <p>Work on learning rote sequences using pictures as prompts, e.g. different pictures for each day of the week.</p>

Verbal Reasoning		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Problems gaining knowledge about how the world works.            Difficulty understanding cause and effect relationships.            Unable to make predictions.            Confusion when following instructions or completing tasks.            Weak vocabulary skills.            Unable to generalise from one situation or task to another.            Difficulty making inferences.            May find it hard to stick to the point during narrative.            May have poor awareness of a listener's needs in conversation.            Can be over literal in interpretation.</p>	<p>Poor knowledge of how the world works leading to child being vulnerable.            Poorly developed learning strategies.            Will need help to follow stories and 'read between the lines' of questions.            Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.            Tasks requiring problem solving may be difficult, e.g. science but generally when language has been explained the child is able to do the 'thinking'.            May be isolated or need help making friends as may not be aware of the consequences of actions.</p>	<p>Try to use short simple sentences and back these up with visual cues where possible.            Give instructions one at a time and check for understanding.            Use lots of repetition and encourage the child to ask for repetition.            Encourage prediction skills by asking 'what happens next' during familiar sequences.            Ask questions around situations or stories. Encourage the child to tell you 'how' they know the answer.            Make time to explain the consequences of the child's actions when problems arise. Role play is useful for this.</p>

Concepts		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Problems following instructions involving concepts in particular time and space. Weak vocabulary skills. Weak sequencing skills. May find it hard to build up good learning strategies.</p>	<p>Poor understanding of maths and science work. Poor knowledge of how the world works leading to child being vulnerable. Difficulty following instructions in PE relating to time and sequence. Generally poor at following classroom instructions. Will need help to complete tasks and develop good learning strategies. Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.</p>	<p>Try to use short simple sentences and back these up with visual cues where possible. Give instructions one at a time and check for understanding. Use lots of repetition and encourage the child to ask for repetition. Encourage concept development by direct work on concepts of time and space. Practise sequencing skills by using familiar everyday routines or well-known stories.</p>

Context		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Limited ability to generalise, make associations and categorise.</p> <p>Difficulty understanding abstract concepts such as time, distance, volume, speed and emotion.</p> <p>Unable to grasp the subtleties of meaning, e.g. implications, jokes that involve word play.</p> <p>Poor conversational structure.</p> <p>Weak vocabulary skills.</p>	<p>Rigid thinking with limited problem solving skills.</p> <p>Difficulty relating to the past or future.</p> <p>Poorly developed conversational skills.</p> <p>Unable to keep to the point in conversation.</p> <p>Unable to follow changes in topic.</p> <p>Poor awareness of what the listener needs to know, either omitting information or giving too much detail.</p> <p>Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.</p>	<p>Try to provide a good clear model of language keeping any instructions short and unambiguous.</p> <p>Work on expanding the child's awareness of time.</p> <p>Highlight key points in text or stories to draw the child's attention to the context.</p> <p>During reading comprehension tasks read the questions first and discuss the context before reading the rest of the text.</p> <p>Give the child reminders to stay on topic during conversation, e.g. <i>'We are not talking about trains now we are talking about the cat in the picture.'</i></p> <p>Use clear OHP film over text or pictures. Then draw or underline important parts to highlight the overall context for the child.</p>

Vocabulary		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Hesitant disjointed spoken language.</p> <p>Weak auditory memory skills.</p> <p>Limited ability to generalise, make associations and categorise.</p>	<p>Poor understanding of topic vocabulary particularly in maths and science.</p> <p>Poor verbal skills. May know the words but be unable to retrieve them using fillers instead, e.g. <i>'that thing; what's its name.'</i></p> <p>Reading difficulties. May recognise the word on the page but be unable to retrieve it.</p> <p>Will need help to complete tasks and develop good learning strategies.</p> <p>Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.</p> <p>May avoid situations where has to speak in front of groups.</p> <p>May show signs of frustration at inability to find the words.</p>	<p>Give the child extra time to formulate responses.</p> <p>Try to reduce anxiety by encouraging gesture and other means of conveying the information.</p> <p>Encourage the child to self-cue, e.g. <i>'think of the first sound.'</i></p> <p>Practise semantic linking activities to help the child categorise and make links and associations. (See Vocabulary Section of this website for more ideas.)</p> <p>Plan ahead. Teach new topic vocabulary before the child will need to use it.</p>

Language Structure (Grammar)		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Disjointed spoken language. May use only key words, e.g. want book.</p> <p>Poor conversational structure. Poor reading comprehension. Poor sequencing skills for ordering information, instructions or parts of a task.</p> <p>Difficulty following grammatical rules. Difficulty learning new words and building up a broad vocabulary. May have poor phonological processing skills (see below).</p>	<p>Poor understanding of topic vocabulary particularly in maths and science.</p> <p>Difficulty relating to the past or future.</p> <p>Poorly developed conversational skills.</p> <p>Will find it hard to answer questions presented both verbally and in text.</p> <p>May lose place in text and misunderstand due to grammatical complexity, e.g. pronouns, verb tenses, plurals, etc.</p>	<p>Try to provide a good clear model of language keeping any instructions short and unambiguous.</p> <p>Work on expanding the child's awareness of time.</p> <p>Highlight key points in text or stories to draw the child's attention to the context.</p> <p>During reading comprehension tasks read the questions first and discuss the context before reading the rest of the text.</p> <p>Give the child reminders to stay on topic during conversation, e.g. <i>'We are not talking about trains now we are talking about the cat in the picture.'</i></p> <p>Use clear OHP film over text or pictures. Then draw or underline important parts to highlight the overall context for the child.</p>

Conversation		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Difficulty taking turns. May change topic suddenly within a conversation. Does not join in but only talks about what interests them. Talks at people rather than to them. Interrupts others' conversations. Difficulty initiating conversation.</p>	<p>Group tasks where group needs to work together may be hard.</p> <p>Poor knowledge of how the world works leading to child being vulnerable.</p> <p>May show signs of frustration at inability to communicate which can lead to using physical means to make a point.</p>	<p>Use good talking cards to explain rules for conversation.</p> <p>Play turn taking games and reward turn taking when it happens naturally.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for paired conversation with peers and adults to practise skills.</p>



Social Understanding		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Rigid thinking. Will stick to familiar routines and topics. Does not understand other children's points of view. Very literal in understanding. Will tell the truth even when it's not appropriate to do so, e.g. '<i>Mr Williams is very fat.</i>'</p>	<p>May find changing from one activity to another difficult.</p> <p>Group tasks where group needs to work together may be hard.</p> <p>Poor knowledge of how the world works leading to child being vulnerable.</p> <p>Difficulty following instructions in PE relating to time and sequence.</p> <p>Generally poor at following classroom instructions.</p> <p>Will need help to complete tasks and develop good learning strategies.</p> <p>Rigid thinking with limited problem solving skills.</p> <p>May show signs of frustration at inability to communicate which can lead to using physical means to make a point.</p>	<p>Use visual timetables and task management boards to help child cope with changes to routine.</p> <p>Use social stories for situations that are causing difficulty, e.g. lining up.</p> <p>Teach child rules for different situations, e.g. '<i>When we are lining up we keep our hands away from others, we give other children space.</i>'</p> <p>Make all rules explicit.</p> <p>Avoid using idioms or expressions as these children will take everything at face value.</p> <p>Keep instructions and explanations short.</p> <p>Use visual support as much as possible.</p>

Non-Verbal Communication		
Associated problems	Impact: The classroom situations the child may find hard	Strategies to support listening
<p>Poor eye contact either too little or too much.</p> <p>Facial expression may not match the content of the message, e.g. tells sad news while smiling.</p> <p>May use inappropriate tone of voice.</p> <p>Difficulty reading others' facial expressions.</p> <p>May have poor spatial awareness leading to standing too close.</p>	<p>Vulnerable to teasing due to unusual interaction.</p> <p>Will need support to resolve playground disputes.</p> <p>May respond inappropriately to others during group tasks, e.g. laughs at the wrong time.</p> <p>May become distressed in close proximity to other children.</p>	<p>Use good listening and good talking cards to teach rules for working with others.</p> <p>Boost understanding of emotional vocabulary.</p> <p>Allow time for children to talk about their feelings.</p> <p>Practise identifying facial expressions.</p>