



Language Skills

What is language?

- Language can be divided into two main areas: [receptive language](#) and [expressive language](#).
- [Receptive language](#) = understanding of language and making sense of language. This can include understanding vocabulary, instructions, sentence structure, grammatical constructs, stories/texts, non-literal language e.g. jokes and idioms, social language e.g. slang terms and sarcasm, and inference and prediction skills.
- [Expressive language](#) = language that is produced, language output – both spoken and written. This can include using vocabulary, sentence structures and grammatical constructs, telling or retelling stories, giving others instructions, using non-literal language e.g. jokes and idioms, and using social language e.g. slang terms.
- Once a child enters secondary school, their language skills need to expand considerably to meet the demands of secondary education; they are expected to understand more complex instructions, ideas and vocabulary, as well as be able to express their answers, thoughts and opinions in a clear and well-structured way using a variety of vocabulary. Social language and non-literal language demands also increase, with more emphasis on the use of slang terms, sarcasm, jokes, idioms, similes and metaphors. (NB. The areas of vocabulary, non-literal language and social language will be covered in further advice sheets later in the academic year)
- You may be wondering if you can support your teenager's language skills at home...the answer is yes! We use language every single day and there are many easy activities and games you can carry out at home or when out and about, which often require no resources except paper, a pen and some imagination!

Receptive language activities:

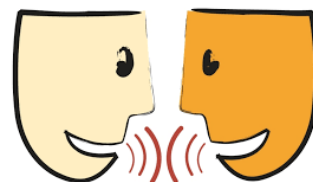
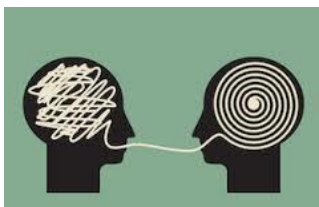
- **Discuss any reading your teenager does (books, newspapers or magazines) with them.** Ask them questions about the story or the article, and see if they can make any predictions about what might happen next.
- **Give your teenager sets of instructions to follow.** These could be everyday instructions such as "get the plates and cutlery out, lay the table, wash your hands and then make drinks for dinner", or it could be instructions to complete a specific task e.g. a puzzle, craft activity or Lego set. Try using different lengths of instructions, and vary the number of instructions you give at once – you might start off saying 1 instruction at a time, but work up to 3 or 4 at a time. This will depend on your child's language levels and memory ability. Try and introduce concepts like before, after, next, then, firstly, secondly, finally – these types of words will be used frequently in a secondary school classroom. If you are giving instructions for a craft activity or Lego set, use language based around colours, shapes, sizes and prepositions (under, behind, next to etc). Using Lego to develop understanding of instructions links with Lego Therapy, which we have introduced at Mary Hare over the last year. For more information on Lego Therapy, please refer to the Soundwave magazine from summer 2016, which contains an article explaining more about it.
- **Look at pictures together (books, magazines, newspapers, Internet) and discuss what is happening.** Ask your teenager questions about the picture – can they work out what might be happening? Can they name any objects or people in the pictures? (this targets vocabulary and world knowledge). Try and ask questions to develop inference skills (reading between the lines) – what is happening that isn't immediately obvious? For example, how might people in the picture be feeling, and why? Also try and ask prediction questions – what could happen after this picture? Why do you think that?
- **Watch news programmes such as Newsround together, and discuss the stories.** Ask your teenager questions about the events, including their opinion on the stories. Again, try to ask questions to develop inference and prediction skills.

Expressive language activities:

- **Ask your teenager to retell a story or article you have read together, or to narrate a story they are familiar with.** Encourage accurate sentence structure and grammar, logical order and varied vocabulary. You could film your teenager telling the story, then discuss and practice anything they found difficult, and film them again to see the improvements they have made. Ask them to explain different vocabulary words from their story – can they explain the meaning in a clear and concise way? You could also discuss how the characters are feeling at various points throughout the story – this will help to develop emotions vocabulary and inference skills (how can you tell someone is feeling a certain way? What clues are there to tell you this?).
- **Make up your own story!** Work together to plan and create a story. Encourage accurate sentence structure and grammar, logical order and varied vocabulary. Be imaginative – use as many interesting ideas and words as you can! You could write and perform your story – film your teenager telling the story that you have created together.
- **Play a 30 second talking game.** Write some topics on paper or cards e.g. 'my favourite holiday', 'what I did in school this week', 'what I want to be when I am older'. Take it in turns to speak for 30 seconds about your topic – try not to pause too often! This activity will help to practice organisation skills (planning and organising what to say), vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar. Discuss answers afterwards – ask your teenager further questions, and encourage them to ask you questions as well.
- **Play the 'yes/no' game.** This is a bit trickier, but lots of fun! Take it in turns to answer yes/no questions e.g. 'do you like dogs?', 'have you ever been to America?', without actually saying yes or no. It's harder than you might think, and really encourages word-finding and problem solving skills. You could make up questions on the spot, or have some pre-prepared sets ready on paper or cards. You could also use a timer and see how many questions each person can answer correctly within the time limit – keep a record, and the person with the most at the end of the game wins!
- **Play the 'what if...' question game.** Create some cards with different scenarios on, in the format of 'what would you do if...?'. For example: 'What would you do if you found £100 in the street?', 'What would you do if you got locked out of your house?', 'What would you do if you had an argument with your best friend?'. Take it in turns to answer questions, discussing your answers together. This game targets a whole range of language skills, such as sentence structure, vocabulary, narrative skills, inference/prediction skills, logical thinking and problem solving skills. You could compare your answers and decide who has the better solution to the problem. Making the scenarios personal to your teenager will help them to 'work out' real life problems they may encounter, and learn different strategies for managing these.

The speech and language therapy department hope that these ideas are useful for you to use at home. If you have any questions or would like to know more, please contact your son/daughter's speech therapist via email or telephone.

Thank you – we hope you have fun putting these ideas into practice, and helping your teenager to develop their language skills!



Securing the future of deaf children and young people