

Participation.
Opportunity.
Choice.



Supporting a Child's Understanding

Tip Sheet

Children who are still developing their understanding may need support to process and respond to everyday language in their early childhood setting. Below are some strategies to support a child to understand what we are saying.

Gaining a child's attention before speaking to them

When autistic children are focused on an activity, they may need extra time and support to shift their attention to us. Simply calling their name or gently tapping them on the shoulder and pausing can support them to shift their focus to us, so that they are ready to listen and process what we are saying

Being responsive to their listening preferences

Some autistic children may find it easier to attend when the speaker is down at their level and is face-to-face whilst speaking. Others may prefer more distance from their communication partner or may find it easier to listen when they are looking away. Some children may listen better when using a fidget tool in their hands. Notice what works better for each child to support their listening and understanding.

Simplifying our language

Simplify and shorten what we are saying to reduce how much language a child needs to process. Remember to keep it grammatical! For example, instead of saying, "Let's make some playdough over at the messy play table," we might say, "Let's make playdough."

Emphasise key words

Use intonation, volume and gestures to stress key words. This will support the child to tune into the important words in what is being said.

Slow down our speech

Speak at a slow, natural pace to give the child more time to process what is being said.



Combining different ways of communicating

Pairing gestures, pictures and objects with our words is an effective way to get our meaning across.

Provide opportunities for repetition

Every interaction we have with a child is a learning opportunity. We can support their learning by using the same key words in different contexts and activities throughout the day. The more meaningful repetitions a child hears, the more likely they are to learn what these words mean!



The Hanen Centre

For more information on how you can support a child with communication and support their understanding visit: www.hanen.org



References

Hanen Centre. (n.d.). Exploring objects helps children learn about language. The Hanen Centre. Retrieved September 17, 2024, from <https://www.hanen.org/home>

