

For further information about this service contact:

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Notes

Speech and Language Therapy Service Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Understanding Language

If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.

Understanding Language

When we communicate we need to understand as well as talk.

It is not always easy to tell whether your child understands what you say. How can we help?

Understanding each other

Think what might happen if these phrases were not understood:

(to a child) "You mustn't touch, it's very hot."

(to the milkman) "No milk for 2 weeks, we're away on holiday."

(to medical staff) "I'm allergic to penicillin."

How we understand

Words are only part of the story. In order to understand what someone is saying we use other clues, for example: •

- pointing and gesture
- facial expression
- tone of voice
- knowledge of what usually happens
- other people's actions or reactions.

Many parents say that their child understands everything they say to him - but does he understand the words or is he picking up the other clues?

For example, you may be pointing to or looking at what you want him to get. By about 2 years of age, children can understand a simple command such as 'put the bear in the boat', 'point to your nose'.

There are many reasons why a child may not fully understand what is being said to him.

Your speech and language therapist will give you advice and suggestions about how you can help - see next page...

- Make sure your child is listening when you are speaking to him. Attract his attention by saying his name and getting eye contact first.
- Set aside a few minutes of quiet time, preferably every day. Background noise such as the television or radio is distracting so switch them off when you talk to each other.
- Use simple language to start with - short sentences said clearly and slowly will be more helpful than lots of details. For example, say "more bubbles?" not "do you want me to make some more bubbles for you?".
- Make comments about what is happening now, e.g. what the child is doing at the time, rather than talking about things that haven't happened yet.
- Relate the word you are saying to the actual object or action by talking about activities as you are doing them, for example, when dressing, eating, at bath time, bedtime, going shopping.
- Use lots of repetition of the same words, for example at bath time you can say "wash face, wash hands, wash feet".
- Use actions to reinforce the meaning of the words.

Looking and listening

Play pointing games. If you have a selection of objects, for example a cup, a ball, a brush and a shoe, you can ask your child to show you one of them. Say "show me the cup". In this way you can tell if he is listening to and understanding you. Try not to look at the cup when you ask this. Look at books together. Try to choose books with clear, simple pictures.

Photos are especially useful. Talk about the pictures and ask your child to point to pictures that you name or describe, for example "can you see the dog?", "look at the swing", "who is eating/running?" etc. Don't ask too many questions at once and give your child time to look at the pictures and think before responding.