



Speech and Language Therapy Department

Supporting Early Communication Skills in Children with a Visual Impairment

Children with a visual impairment may have difficulty with the following;

FACES They can't look at, follow faces or see changing facial expressions. Because of this interactions may be shorter & less frequent. It may be difficult for your child to imitate or keep interactions going. There is less motivation if a child can't see their parents' faces.

YOU CAN use lots of voice, touch, repetition, get close to their face, use exaggerated facial expressions etc. give your child lots of time to look if they can or guide them to touch and explore your face. Play games where you make faces – stick out your tongue, squash nose etc. spend time touching each other's faces & talking about what you find e.g. “my mouth is open, your eyes are shut, I've found your nose, where's that tongue” etc.



Guide your child's hand to your face when you're talking – you could kiss their hand. Talk from different sides of your child's face to encourage them to turn to you as you talk.

SOUNDS

Your child may respond differently to different sounds including sudden loud noise, soothing music and different voices. Your baby may become quiet, still, distressed or make excited body movements. It may take longer for your child to realise sounds have a source because they cannot see the link.



THINGS YOU CAN DO

Infants learn a lot about their home world through the regular patterns of daily routines. Take your child to sounds & tell/show them what makes the noise. Different rooms or areas in the house can be recognised by children by the different sounds, textures, smells or sights. Develop this by pointing out links to activities like the sound of water splashing, the smell of bath bubbles, the feel of warm water, wrapping your child in a warm towel in the bathroom, or the light reflecting on the mirror.

Talk to your child about the sounds they hear when you are out. Use toys which make noises and encourage your child to reach & find toys. If your child wants a toy don't always give it directly to them – take them to find the toy or put it down near them & encourage them/help them to search for it.



BABBLE

Children who have a visual impairment may not make as many babbling noises (ma, da, ba ba) as they spend more time listening to sounds to work out what is happening.

YOU CAN

Play games with sounds. Imitate the sounds your child makes, as this will encourage them to make more sounds. Try to build up turn-taking routines making sounds. You can make some different sounds to see if they will listen or imitate them. Try doing these games with both of you in front of a mirror or very close face to face. Sit where the light shines on your face to encourage your child to look.

Have some quiet times in the day when you talk to or play with your child when there are no distracting sounds like TV, radio, other people talking, so that your child can hear your voice clearly.

REAL EXPERIENCES Your child cannot learn from watching others do things so s/he needs to be involved in lots of hands on experience.

YOU CAN help right from the early stages by involving child in everyday things that you do. These are activities that you already engage in on a daily basis. Let your child hold things when they are being changed. Get them involved in the preparation of bath time – running water, finding soap, getting towel ready etc. use hand over hand assistance if necessary & talk them through all the stages naming objects & saying simply what you are doing. Do the same routines each time as this helps a child with visual impairment learn. Get them involved when you go out shopping – give them something to hold/have beside them, talk about what you are going to buy, putting it in the basket, taking it out & putting it away when you get home etc. allow you child feel & explore item.



UNDERSTANDING MEANING Children with a visual impairment may take longer associating sounds / words with the object

YOU CAN continue the everyday familiar routines for feeding, bathing, dressing etc. Your child may start to show that they're anticipating the next step in a routine, e.g. they show excitement when you say 'dinner time' and put on their bib. Help your child to explore everyday objects before they use them, e.g. a spoon during feeding, a towel or sponge at bath time. Use a guiding hands approach for helping to explore objects, name the object at the same time.

Remember your child will learn to link words with objects and actions through regular routines and activities if you use the same words and phrases. Use the same phrases to help your child to anticipate what's going to happen, e.g. always say 'up you come' before lifting them or 'bath time' as you take them for a bath. Give your child an additional cue to anticipate the activity, touch their arm saying 'up' or give them a cloth before bath time.

Activities

Action Games & Rhymes are really good for linking meaning & words as they use immediate language. Use rhymes & songs you know or just make them up to suit an activity.

Tickling Game

I'm coming to tickle your tummy, your tummy, your tummy. I'm coming to tickle your tummy just like this.

Do as many verses as you like naming different body parts – feet/hands/chin etc. wait a bit before the “just like this” bit to help build anticipation and give your child time to look or reach)



Bouncing Game

“Here we go bouncing up & down, up & down, up & down,
Here we go bouncing up & down, up & down” (Mulberry Bush song)
You can vary this song by doing side to side or fast & slow.
Remember: do the up & down or other actions slowly so the child can get a real feel for the movements & the contrast.

Hiding Games

Are good for encouraging looking & reaching & also helping develop the concept that objects are still there even when you can't see/hear them (this is known as object permanence). Hide toys/everyday objects in a box, under a blanket or cover, under the table or chair etc. You may need to give quite a lot of help & encouragement to start.
Remember: Give LOTS of praise when the child finds toy or object.

Please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department
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