ChildVision

National Education Centre for Blind Children

Speech and Language Therapy Department

Tip for Team Members Supporting communication when working with a visually impaired child

Understanding

- Use concrete language and be specific. Terms such as 'over here' or 'over there' are not relevant to a child with limited vision. Rather use 'follow my voice' or 'beside the door you came in'

- If targeting goals – be specific about the language used to describe the activity and try to use the same language on each occasion, this will make it easier for the child to pre-empt the activity once they have heard it routinely and reduce their processing load.

- Be aware of the child's communicative ability – how much do they understand? Link with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT)

    - **Do they require objects to anticipate an activity**

    - **Do they require sign along with words (Lamh and/or Canaan Barrie signs) to support understanding. Do they use on body signing?**

    - **Limit the amount of information 1-2 word instructions 'stand up' once the child has followed command continue with next rather than 'stand up and get the ball beside the chair'.**

    - **Can they understand visual concepts 'under' 'over' 'beside' – these may need to be explicitly taught to a child so if they are not responding – language difficulty may be a contributing factor.**

- In a group situation children may find the use of names beneficial to identify who you are referring to e.g. Sam, you crawl under the 'X'.

- Try not to use telegraphic speech (as what you might find in a telegram message!). This type of speech leaves out all the function words! 'Johnny get shoes', this is not a good model for children, rather emphasise the key words 'Johnny put your shoes on'.

- Children may not understand wh- questions such as what, when, where, who & why. Therefore offer them choices between objects or activities 'Do you want the trampoline or the ball' rather than 'what do you want'. If they do not respond use a carrier phrase 'Annie wants the b…' (sound). If the child is repeating your sentences please see the Echolalia hand-out.

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Expression

Does the child use a combination of gesture, vocalisation, and body movements to communicate? Liaise with an SLT as they may produce an adapted Lámh/Canaan Barrie sign to suit their motor function.

Children may produce subtle body movements / sounds to communicate their like & dislike so it's important to be aware of and responsive to these.

Many children with visual impairments find initiating conversation and/or interaction difficult – therefore they may repeat a line previously produced by you or another person. This is called echolalia – the immediate or delayed repetition of others. Again discuss this with the SLT.

General Tips

- Model language that is only slightly longer and more complex than words/sentences you've heard the child use meaningfully. For example if the child uses one word utterances e.g. 'cat' you could expand that by saying 'cat in'.

- Say things that match what's happening from the child's point of view. Comment on what they are doing 'Johnny is jumping on the trampoline, jump jump jump' etc. Rather than 'look at you jumping'.

- Try to avoid questions and verbal instructions e.g. instead of asking a yes/no question (do you want an apple) provide choice ('banana …. Apple … Paul wants …).

- Use people's names if pronouns (I, you, me etc.) are confusing.

- Use words and intonation that will be appropriate and accurate if repeated.

- Respond to the child's speech with words and actions that confirm your understanding of the message, not with praise, which may be echoed 'yes, we're going to work at the table' rather than 'good boy'.

Remember!

Joint sessions are a valuable way of promoting language and understanding in a child. Liaising with an SLT before sessions would benefit the outcome of the session in terms of a child's ability to understand the tasks presented.

For further information and/or support please contact:
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