Difficulties in speaking or understanding

How might communication difficulties present?

- A child may not follow simple verbal instructions.
- The child may appear to be ignoring adults and other children.
- They may get frustrated and this could result in disruptive, destructive or harmful behaviours to themselves or others.
- They may appear withdrawn and solitary in their play and/or seem anxious.
- They may direct speech at others, but be unclear and not be able to be understood.
- They may speak clearly, but the language is out of context and/or not communicate their wants, needs or views.

Strategies

While every situation is different, here are some general guidelines for supporting children.

Environment and resources



- Objects of reference are objects that have particular meaning associated to them. They act as a visual reinforcement, so if a child is struggling to understand the spoken word, they can begin to associate objects with events etc and therefore understand what is about to happen. Using objects of reference can also act as a bridge to other forms of communication such as signs, symbols or spoken language.
- Other visuals provide visual prompts including key vocabulary and visual timetables.
- Think about the environment and limiting any distractions.
- Think about the seating arrangements.
- Create an appropriate environment (noise, room temperature, lighting, room layout).

Activities



- Talking Tunes is an approach to singing that focuses on learning early vocabulary. Research has shown that awareness and skills in music are closely linked to language development. The vocabulary is taught using songs with repetitive language with well known tunes. There is an emphasis on singing the songs slowly to optimise the children's language learning opportunities. Parents are encouraged to sing songs to everyday routines at home with their children.
- Pre-teaching of topic vocabulary.

Interactions



- Allow time for child to process and respond (10 second rule).
- Check you have engaged the child's attention before talking to them, use their name to do this.
- Use simple instructions which provide positive direction i.e. tells the child what you do want them to do rather than what you don't want them to do.
- Use positive body language and a calm, clear tone of voice.
- If you know the word the child has tried to say, say it back to them clearly, so they have a good model, with a slight emphasis on the error sound e.g. child: 'I found a tar' Adult: 'Yes you found a car'.
- React to what the child says, not how clearly they say it and don't ask the child to repeat or say words they find difficult.
- Say "show me" if you don't understand what the child has said.
- It is normal for a child to be able to produce a sound by itself, but not use it in words. This is because a child has to learn how and when to use the sound in their speech. Repeating words correctly back to the child is the best way to help.
- Makaton is a language programme that uses signs, speech and symbols to support children with a communication difficulty/learning disability for basic communication.
- Intensive Interaction is a research-based approach to teach early communication and interaction skills. It is about sharing quality time with a focus on supportive and enjoyable shared experiences. Through these experiences your child will develop their competence as a communicator that is meaningful at their level. The approach aims to teach the basic fundamentals of communication as well as helping develop sociability, cognitive abilities and emotional well-being.

What else?



- Check that hearing has been tested.
- Sirona Speech and Language Support – Early Years
  - Adapted more than words is a free four week training programme for Early Years Staff working in Bristol with a child with Autism or Social Communication Difficulties.
  - Teacher Talk is a free seven week Hanen based training programme for Early Years Staff working in Bristol that promotes children's social, language and literacy development.

Useful links



Dingley's Promise – online training module (Behaviour that Challenges)

Ordinarily Available Provision, Bristol's Local SEND Offer

Early Years Speech & Language Therapy (sirona-cic.org.uk)