

Difficulties with Talking (Expressive)

When we want to say something, first we have an idea. We choose the words and sentences we want to use and the order we want to use them in.

Some children can have difficulty with one or more of these things meaning they'll struggle to say what they want.

Expressive Language Difficulties

How Children Might Struggle

They might show signs of one or any combination of the following:

Difficulty talking in sentences

Talking using only a few words or simple sentences

Difficulty finding the words they need - like when you know someone's name but just can't remember it ...

Difficulty organising their words and sentences, so talk is confused and difficult to follow

Selective mutism - some children find it very difficult to talk in some situations, so they may choose not to.



Strategies to Help

Avoid correction of errors, instead model back the child's sentence in the correct form

If they cannot think of a word, try cueing them in e.g the sound it begins with

Try to 'comment more than question' to encourage children to initiate a conversation

Always remember to value what the child says and to show that you do

Take time to talk over experiences, events of the day etc

Difficulties with understanding (Receptive)

When we listen to someone else speaking, we pay attention so that we remember what we've heard, we understand the words and sentences they've used and we know the meaning behind what they've said.

However, some children struggle to understand words and sentences.

Receptive Language Difficulties

How children might struggle

They might have difficulties with one or any combination of the following:

Listening and paying attention as it's hard to listen when you don't understand lots of what's being said

Understanding words and short sentences

Understanding the specific meanings of words

Understanding long or complicated sentences

Understanding grammar - such as 'he' means a boy or man, or 'walked' is something that has already happened

Understanding idioms such as 'keep your hair on'



Strategies to Help

Allow time for children to process the information

Break down instructions into manageable chunks and emphasise the key parts

Give the instructions in the order they are to be carried out

Speak simply and clearly without rushing

Use routine and structure to reinforce understanding

Use signs, symbols and gestures where appropriate

Difficulties with social communication

Some children find it hard to use their speaking and understanding skills to, for example, have a conversation, even though they might be able to talk clearly and in sentences. When we're having conversations, we take turns speaking and listening, we check what we're saying makes sense and that other people are listening. We use the right non-verbal communication such as smiling and nodding our head and we correct any misunderstandings that may arise. Some children find all of this difficult.

Social Communication Difficulties

How Children Might Struggle

Their difficulties might come across as one or any combination of the following:

Not looking at you when you're talking or perhaps staring too much

Not listening well or interrupting too much

Often struggling to join in with group conversations, might misinterpret what's said or take things very literally

Struggling to pick up on non-verbal information, such as if someone else is cross or bored

Staying on the topic of conversation or talking about only their own interests

Problems using language to have good conversations or to discuss, negotiate or argue



Strategies to Help

Practice conversations and help children to:
Be able to start and finish a conversation well.

Take turns and not interrupt.

Be aware of what a listener already knows or how they might be feeling.

Be relevant - stay on topic

Be aware of the situation and who we are talking to e.g. Headteacher, a friend

Use naturally occurring situations to raise the pupil's awareness of facial expression/ body language/ behaviour and emotions in others and themselves.

Be aware jokes, sarcasm, colloquialisms may need explaining

Difficulties with speech

When we want to make a sound our brain sends a message to the muscles in our mouth to make the right shape so that we can make speech sounds. Children with speech difficulties may have problems pronouncing words or being fluent.

Speech Difficulties

How children might struggle

Their difficulties might come across as one or any combination of the following:

Difficulty in being understood

Speaking too quickly (run words into each other)

Saying the same word differently at different times

Stammering e.g. hesitating, repeating sounds / words, and getting stuck

Muddling some speech sounds



Strategies to Help

Model i.e avoid correcting speech - rather model correct production and stress sounds where errors are made

Do not pretend to understand - suggest they slow down

Check that you have understood correctly by asking the child a question and/or saying back to them what you thought they said

Slow down your rate of speech to show a good model of slow relaxed speech