Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential

Goal: Developing information carrying words

When children are in the early stages of their language development, we measure their progress by thinking about the number of information carrying words they are able to understand in an instruction. As their language develops children are able to understand more information in an instruction or sentence. Young children may only be able to follow one or two key words. When adults use more information carrying words than the child can understand they usually get confused and don't understand.

The number of information carrying words is different to the number of words in a sentence. The information carrying words are the ones that the child needs to understand in order to follow the instruction.

Let's consider the following sentence.

"The dog is chasing the cat."

The sentence has six words, but it has three information carrying words which carry the meaning of the sentence.

"The <u>dog</u> is <u>chase</u>(ing) the <u>cat</u>."

Young children often use words in chunks or phrases so their idea of a number of words is different to that of an adult. Words such as sit down, see you later, thank you, what's that, my turn, are considered two or three words by adults, but have a single meaning to young children, who always use the words together as a single unit, and not separately.

A child who is speaking at the two information carrying words level may use the following types of sentences:

"<u>Sit down</u> <u>doggy</u>"
"<u>My turn</u> <u>push</u>"
"<u>Bye bye</u> <u>mummy</u>"

When listening to information carrying words, the context and predictability also makes a difference.

Consider the following situation. A child is standing in the kitchen and you hand him an empty juice container and say "Put your juice bottle in the <u>bin</u>." In this situation, the child only needs to understand the one information carrying word, "bin" to follow the instruction.

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In a similar situation child is standing in the kitchen and on the table there is a milk bottle, a juice bottle and a cup of juice. You say to the child "Put your juice bottle next to the bin." In this example, the child needs to understand four information carrying words to get the instruction correct.

The speech pathologist can provide you with activities to develop your child's ability to listen and understand as well as use increased numbers of information carrying words.

Using the information carrying words games

These games consist of some background pictures, and some small pictures which are placed onto the background pictures.

1. Cut out the small pictures.

2. Place the background pictures in front of the child and check that they know the names of each of the pictures.

3. Next place the small pictures in front of the child and check that they know the names of each of these items.

4. Tell your child that you are going to play a listening game and that they need to listen carefully and do what you say.

5. Give your child an instruction at the appropriate level for them to begin, emphasising the information carrying words.

6. Praise them if they place the item correctly.

7. If they are not able to follow the instruction give them a clue by handing them the small picture needed or by pointing to the large picture where they need to place the item. If they then do this correctly model the instruction again "well done, you put the pig in the truck."

8. If your child gets all the pictures placed correctly the instructions are simple for them and they need to move to a higher level. If your child is making many mistakes the instructions are too difficult and you need to move to a lower level. A good working level is where your child is getting three or four out of each five instructions correct.

9. Once your child is skilled at following instructions at a particular level, you can then encourage them to give the instructions to you. Some children need to work at a lower level when they are giving the instructions than when they are listening. You may need to cue your child initially by asking, "Which one should I do?" and then, "Where should I put it?". Once they tell you what to do model their instruction in a full sentence "I'll put the sheep in the shed".

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Levels of information carrying words

1 Information Carrying Word

Give the child a small picture and tell them "Put it in/on the _____" e.g. put it on the truck.

2 Information Carrying Words

Tell your child "Put _____ in/on the _____" e.g. put the sheep on the truck.

3 Information Carrying Words

Increase the number of items:
"Put the _____ and the _____ in/on the _____" e.g. put the cow and the sheep on the truck.

Or add a position word:
"Put the _____ in/on/under/next to the _____" e.g. put the cow next to the truck.

Or add a describing word:
"Put the _____ in/on the colour/size _____" e.g. put the cow in the red truck, or put the cow in the big truck.

4 Information Carrying Words

Increase the number of items:
"Put the _____ in the_____ and the_____ in the_____" e.g. put the cow in the truck and the sheep in the car.

Or add position or describing words:
"Put the _____ in/on/under/next to the colour/size _____" e.g. put the cow on under the blue car.
"Put the size/colour _____ in/on the size/colour_____ " e.g. put the black cow in the big truck.

When adding describing words, make sure there is a contrasting item available so that the child actually needs to understand the describing word. For example, if asking the child to put the cow in the big truck there needs to be also a small truck available. If asking the child to put the cow in the blue car there needs to be also be a car of another colour.

Information Carrying Words
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