

# **CLASS BASED STRATEGIES**

**Supporting Children's Speech,  
Language and  
Communication in  
Mainstream Primary Schools**

**September 2019**

# Contents Page

**Introduction: Why is this important?..... 3**

**What are Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN)? ..... 4**

## Class Based Strategies – Part 1

**\* Receptive language .....6**

**\* Vocabulary .....10**

**\* Speech .....18**

**\* Supporting Sentence building .....22**

**\* Narrative .....24**

## Class Based Strategies – Part 2

**\* Attention and Listening ..... 30**

**\* Interaction and Social Skills ..... 32**

**\* Verbal Reasoning ..... 38**

**\*Stammering ..... 42**

**Resource Support Guide reference ..... 47**

## **Introduction**

This resource has been put together for the benefit of teachers and staff in schools and includes general advice on how to support children with speech and language difficulties in the classroom. The strategies recommended promote inclusive practice and will benefit ALL children with the aim of developing a model for good practice in teaching children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

## **Why is this so important?**

Recent research has shown approximately 10% or 1.2 million children in the UK have long term persistent Speech, language and communication needs (based on Law et al 2000).

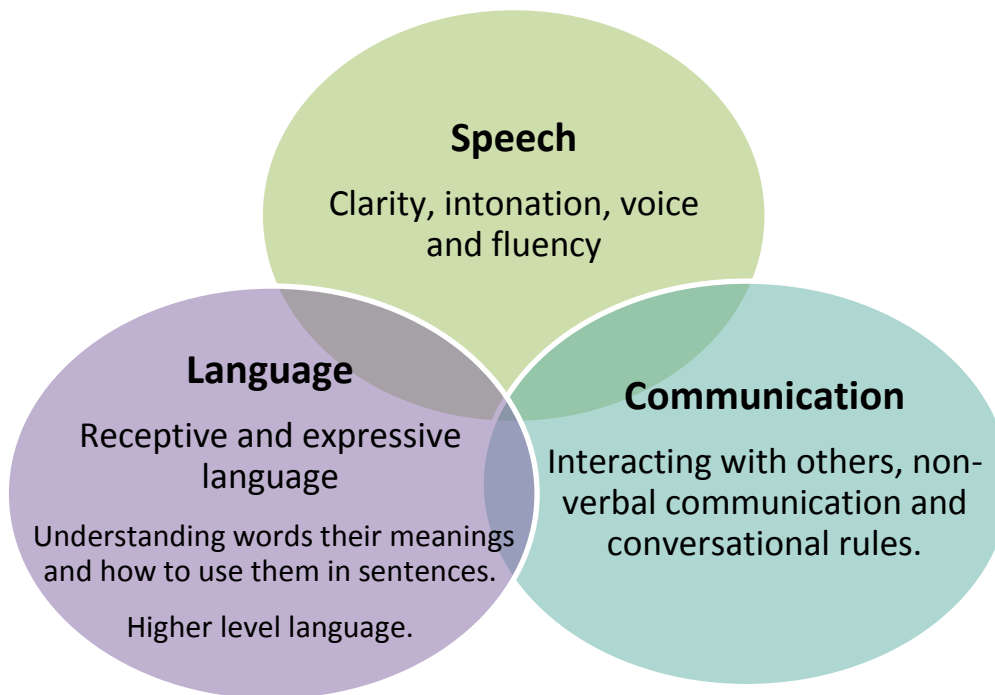
‘If children with language delay do not receive timely support, their difficulties will continue and can adversely affect their academic achievement and social relationships’ (Sage, 2005).

In Early years, only 28% of children identified as having SLCN achieve a good level of development across the 3 prime areas of learning, which includes communication and language, by the end of the Early Years Foundation stage.

At the end of Key Stage 2, just 15% of pupils with SLCN reach the expected level in reading, writing and maths compared with 70% of all pupils – a gap of 55%

This data is based on 2016/17 Department of Education data on Speech, language and Communication needs.

# What are Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)?



## **The Code of Practice definition of SLCN is as follows..**

‘Children and young people with SLCN have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use the social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and the needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech language or social communication at different times of their lives.’

**For further information please follow the Communication Trust links below:**

**How children develop speech, language and communication skills:**

[https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600981/ite\\_resource\\_1.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600981/ite_resource_1.pdf)

**What are Speech, Language and Communication Needs?**

[https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600984/ite\\_resource\\_2.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600984/ite_resource_2.pdf)

**Creating an inclusive classroom:**

[https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600987/ite\\_resource\\_3.pdf](https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/600987/ite_resource_3.pdf)

# **CLASS BASED STRATEGIES**

**What can staff do to help?**

## **Part 1**

## Supporting Receptive Language in the Classroom

Receptive language is important in order to communicate successfully. Children who have understanding difficulties may find it challenging to follow instructions and respond appropriately to questions and requests. As most activities in school require a good understanding of language, it may also make it difficult for a child to access the curriculum or engage in the activities and academic tasks required for their year level of school. If these difficulties are not addressed then this may then lead to attention and listening difficulties and/or behavioural issues.

### What can you do to help?

- **Use visual support to support the spoken message:**

- Use symbols
- Use signs and gestures
- Use real objects where possible.
- Use photographs e.g. the sequence 'changing for PE' photos.
- Demonstrate activities

- **Adapt you language:**

- **Provide a clear model with repetition**

This allows children to hear what language to use and when it is appropriate to use it. Lots of repetition of key words/vocabulary that is being discussed will enable the children to hear new words and the ways they are used.

- **Simplify and Chunk Instructions**

Try to use simple verbal instructions as well as visual support to aid understanding e.g. drawing a picture of an apple/drink to support understanding of 'snack time'

Try not to give too many instructions in one utterance. Break up instructions into shorter utterances. For example change '***Before you sit on the carpet, wash your hands and then get your bags***' into '***Wash your hands. Get your bags. Sit on the carpet***'

→ **Emphasise the word**

Repeat the concept/word in multiple settings and situations so that the child can hear the different ways in which the word can be used.

→ **Slow down and wait**

Try the 10 second rule!

Children who struggle to follow instructions need extra time to process what has been said. By slowing down your rate of talking and pausing will help children to process instructions more effectively. Similarly these children will also need extra time to respond to questions so wait for them to respond. Give them 'thinking time' and allow them 10 seconds to respond. Don't be afraid of the silence.

→ **Use forced alternative questions**

Do you want milk or juice?

Open ended questions can be difficult to respond to if a child has difficulties with language. A forced alternative question allows the child to hear the possible answer to the question. You can also show the items to the child to support their answer.

→ **Create an 'ask friendly' environment**

Encourage children in class to seek clarification when they don't understand and create an 'ask friendly' environment. Praise children who say 'I don't understand' as this will encourage others to do the same.

• **Supporting structure and routine:**


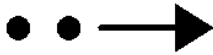
- Label activity areas and resources
- Reduce background noise where possible.
- Use a visual timetable to support understanding of the structure of the day (see attached resources)
- Use 'now/then' or 'first, next, last' boards to support understanding of the sequence in the day (see attached resources)
- To support clarification use a visual 'I don't understand' speech bubble card for children to hold up when they don't understand (see attached resources)
- To check understanding of vocabulary use the sad/smiley faces attached. If a child knows a word they hold up the smiley face, if they are unsure the ok face and if they don't know then the sad face. Children who have held up a smiley face should be encouraged to use the word in a sentence to show that they understand the meaning of the word.

# Visual Supports


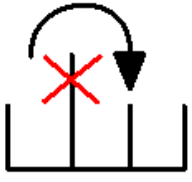
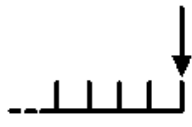
## Visual Timetables



## Now/then board

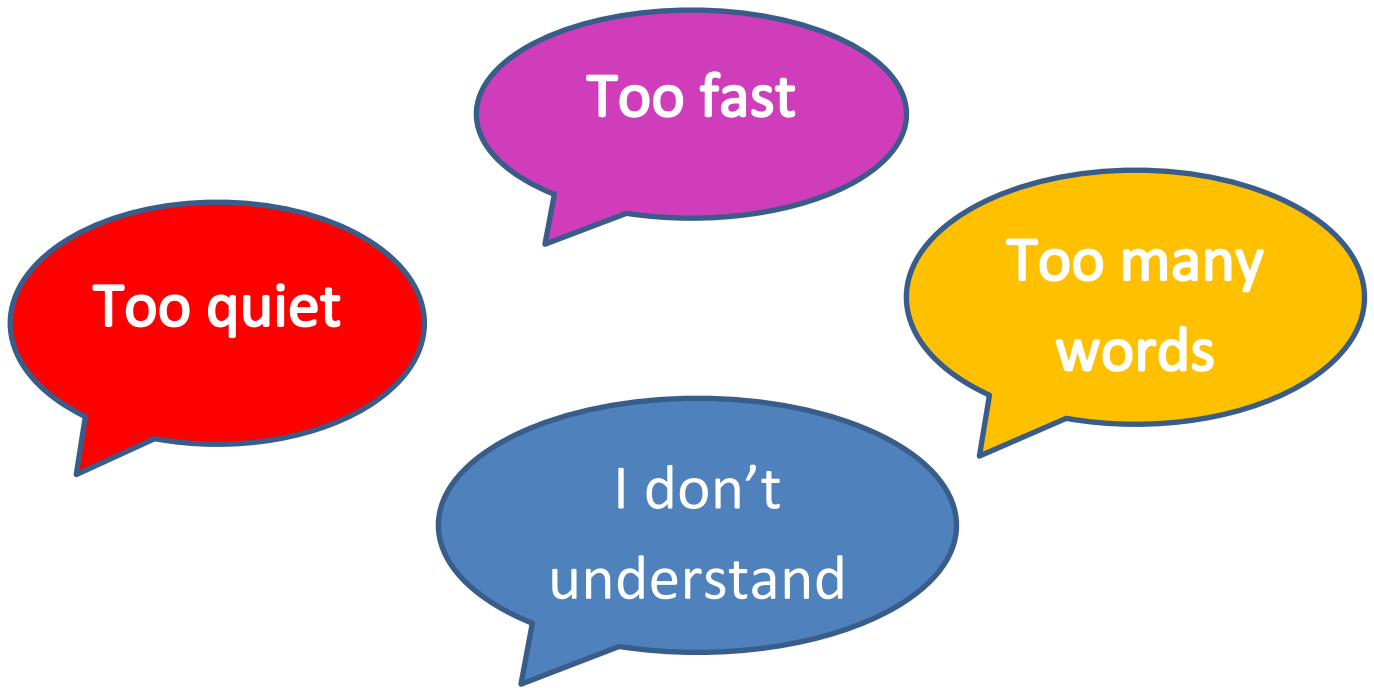
 <p>Now</p>	 <p>Then</p>
---	---

## First/next/last board

 <p>first</p>	 <p>next</p>	 <p>last</p>



## Clarification Speech Bubbles



## Smiley Faces Clarification Visuals

I can do this!

I'm getting there.

I need help!

 Teachers  
copyright www.tpet.co.uk

I can do this!  
I'm ready to try something new.

I'm getting there.  
I need a bit of help.  
I'm a bit unsure.  
I might need to practice.

I need help!  
I don't understand this.  
I'm not ready to move on yet.

 Teachers  
copyright www.tpet.co.uk

## Supporting Vocabulary Development in the Classroom

Vocabulary is more than a list of words. It is both the size of our vocabulary and how we use it which matters most. Everyday life provides most of the vocabulary we need, words are all around us but learning them takes time. A mix of rich language experiences helps to expose us to words and appreciate their meanings, but not all pupils get this in their lives.

Vocabulary is a strong indicator of reading success and having a low vocabulary can trap children in a vicious circle, since children who cannot read more advanced texts miss out on opportunities to extend their vocabulary and are also less successful in using strategies for word learning (Fisher and Blachnowicz, 2005). Children with low vocabularies need to be targeted early since catching up is very difficult.

Direct teaching of vocabulary enhances listening and reading comprehension. The key elements of vocabulary instruction should be:

- 1. Defining and explaining word meanings**
- 2. Ensure the learning environment is word rich**
- 3. Arranging frequent encounters with new words** (at least 6 exposures to a new word)
- 4. Encourage exposure of new words and their meanings in a range of contexts.**

**5. Carefully select appropriate words for planned teaching and reinforcement.**

The key factors here are how easily related the new words are to other words they know and how much knowing the word will help them with the texts and experiences they are likely to encounter.

## What can you do to help?

### Practical classroom ideas

Help pupils to extend vocabulary through whole class and guided group work by:

- **Encouraging a 'word of the day'** use in as many contexts as possible.
- **Modelling specific reading strategies** to develop vocabulary, for example drawing on analogies (rain, snow, sleet) or word families (either linked to spelling patterns or meaning).
- **Checking understanding of vocabulary meaning** through targeted questioning in guided reading and writing sessions.
- **Provide clear objectives for developing vocabulary**, for example giving pupils 4 words and asking them to use them during the lesson.
- **Modelling a piece of writing in front of the class**, explaining and verbalising vocabulary choices as you go.
- **Pre-teaching vocabulary** before meeting it in a text, for example key words such as technical terms, or words in unfamiliar contexts.
- **Make it meaningful and motivating to the student!** The more relevant and accessible it is to them, the easier it will be to remember or recall. Explain the word in language the student can understand, not always a dictionary definition!
- **Give a variety of examples of how a word is used across different contexts.** This will help the pupil to understand the abstract meaning, and the range of different meanings a word may have. For example, the word **level**:
  - 'There are many levels to this problem'
  - 'I'm on the level'
  - 'There are 7 levels in this building'
  - 'The table is not level'.
  - 'Please level with me'

- **Everyone needs to be involved.** It is important that everyone involved knows what strategy the pupil uses. Success is more likely if used across a range of different contexts, and supported by all involved.
- **Small steps work best.** Do not overwhelm the pupil. Focus on a few important words at a time to enable success and boost self-esteem. Don't pressure pupils to speak if they don't want to.
- **Avoid finishing their sentence,** even if vocabulary is used incorrectly. Instead repeat back to them what was said, and see if they can self-correct or prompt themselves to recall the correct word.
- Encourage pupils to **use specific words** instead of vague words, such as "thingy, it, that, doo-da"
- **Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.** Reinforce target words regularly and over a long period of time to ensure retention.

**Encourage pupils to develop vocabulary during independent tasks by:**

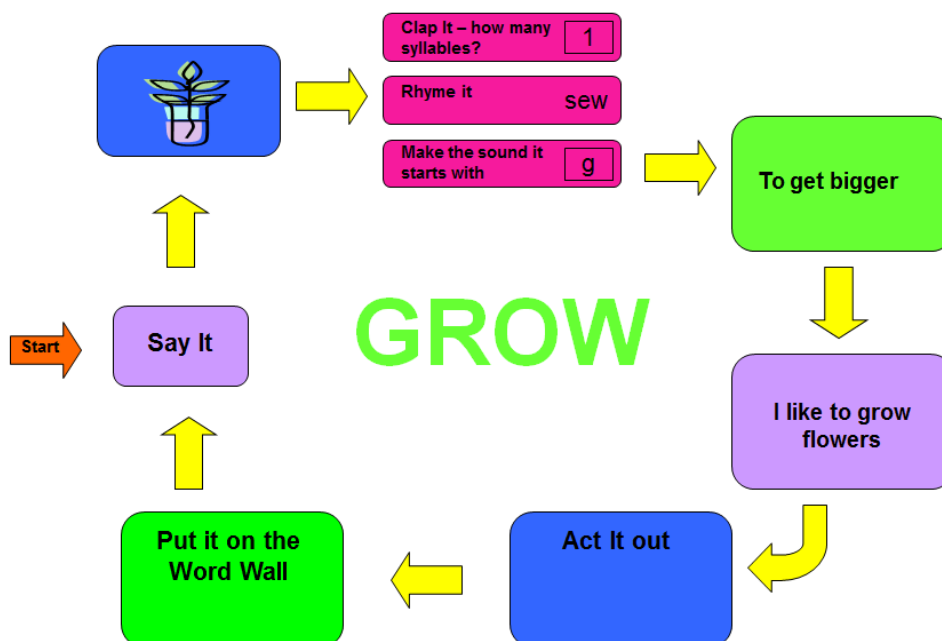
- Promoting the use of **dictionaries, thesauruses and spelling investigations**
- Give pupils a **vocabulary notebook** to record unfamiliar or newly discovered words. This will assist in learning and reflecting on new words and phrases heard in everyday environments.
- **Playing word games** to extend and challenge understanding of vocabulary (e.g. the meaning of 'foul' in sport and other usages) or identifying and focussing on words which act as more than one part of speech (e.g. address (noun) and address (verb)).
- **Encourage reading partners** to talk about books read.

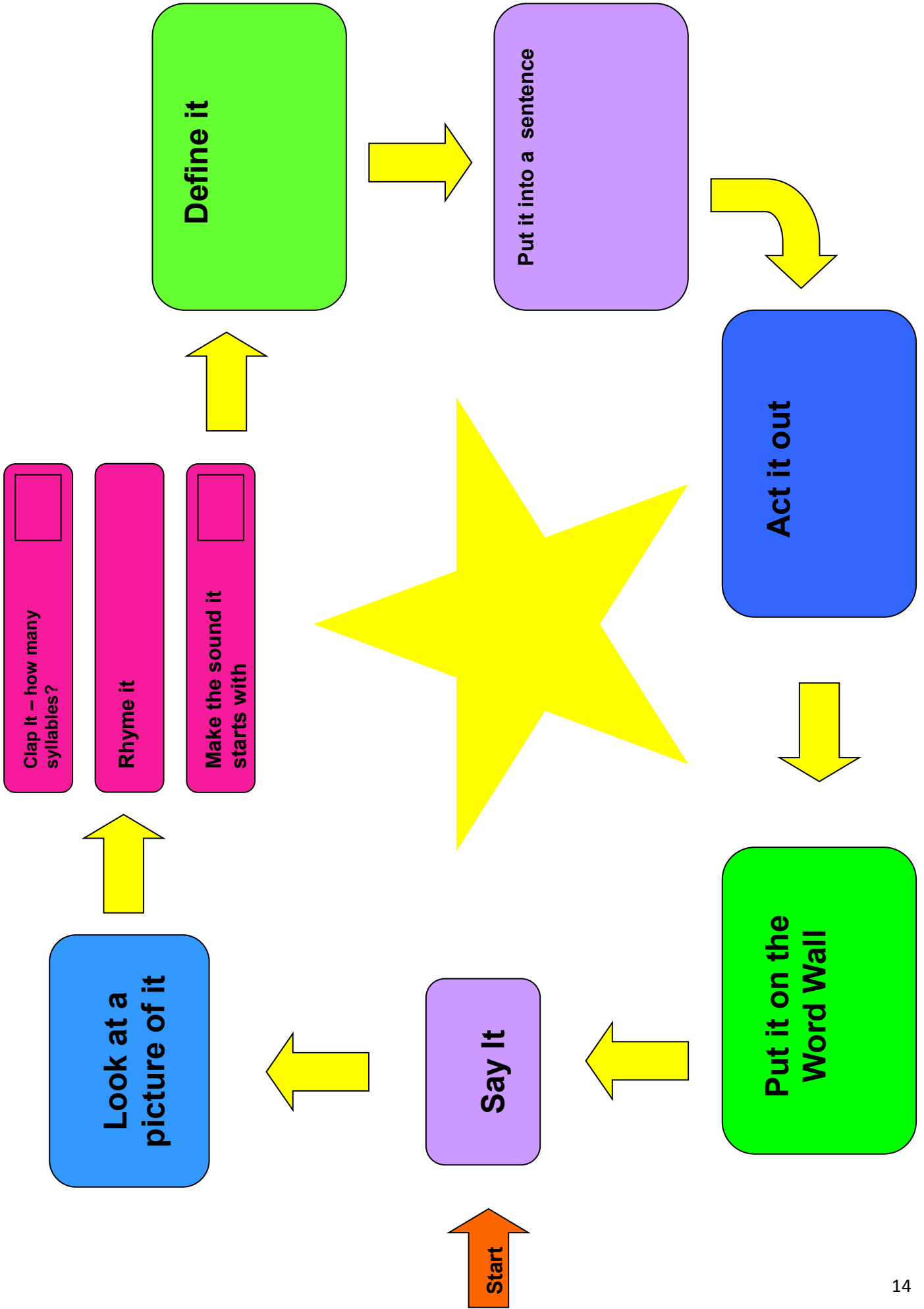
- Give each child a **list of target vocabulary** so they know what words they are expected to learn. This should be differentiated according to individual need.
- Use **visual strategies** to encourage vocabulary learning - use of word maps and mind maps (see examples)
- Keep completed word maps/mind maps etc. in a folder to create a **semantic dictionary**, that the pupil can access as/when needed.

## Visual Supports

### Word maps

Word Maps are excellent for supporting new vocabulary. They explore semantic (word meaning) and phonological knowledge (word structure) at the same time. They are similar to Mind Maps in their use of colour, images and just a few words. However word maps focus on just one word, whereas 'Mind Maps' explore a whole topic. Word Maps can be easily tailored to the child's level of ability.



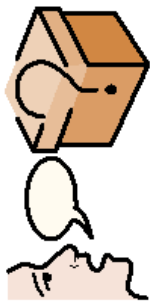




Draw it



Put it into a sentence



Tell me about it



What is it?



Think of an action



More information?



Make a link

What group does it belong to?

Where do you find it?

What does it do?

What is it?

Describe it?

What colour is it?	What shape is it?	What size is it?
What does it feel like?	What does it smell like?	What noise does it make?
What is it made of?	What parts does it have?	What does it taste like?

first sound?

How many syllables?

How many beats?

last sound?

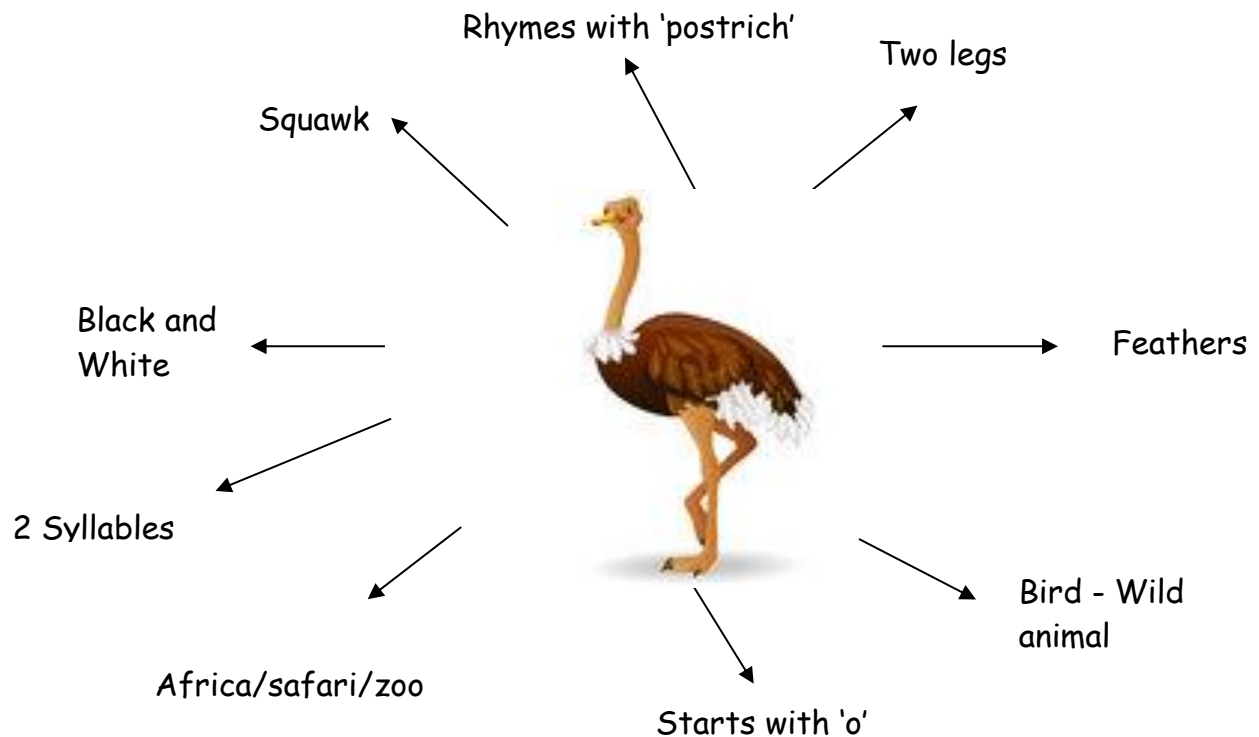
Rhymes with?

sounds like?



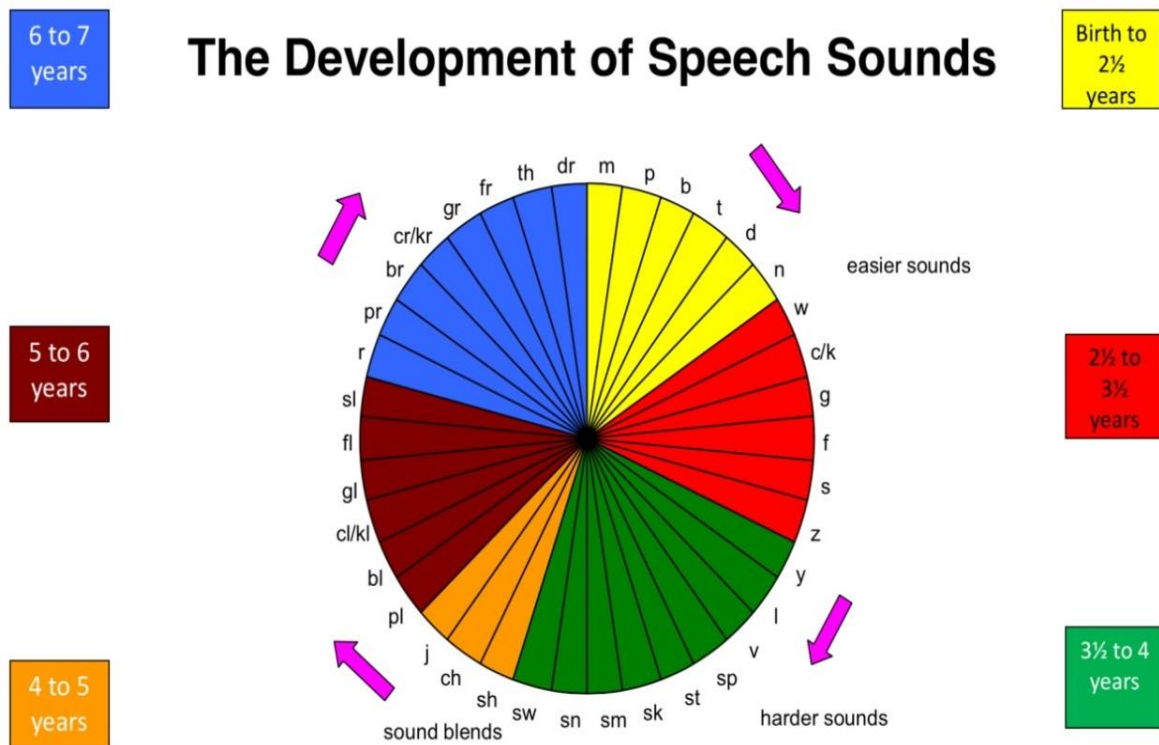
## Word storms

A Word Storm is a variation of a 'brainstorm'. Encourage the student(s) to think of as many words as they can that are associated with the target word. Working in a small group can be helpful, because listening to others ideas can broaden their understanding. This information could be organised and developed into a Mind Map if it is topic based.



# Supporting Speech Development in the Classroom

Children develop speech sounds following a typical pattern within typical age ranges. Some sounds are easier to learn and these will develop first, others will be more challenging. Please refer to the chart below to find out what sounds to expect when.



**When a child presents with speech sound difficulties they may do some of the following:**

- Mix up sounds in words
- Use incorrect sounds or not say the sounds clearly
- Leave sounds out of words
- Struggle to initiate certain sounds
- Think they are saying the same sound as you when they are not

## What can you do to help?

### ***Daily opportunities:***

- Sing nursery rhymes
- Make up silly rhymes e.g. “The cat has a hat on the mat with a bat”
- Clap out syllables of children’s names or objects in a bag. This could be done as a warm up activity in class.

### ***If a child’s speech is unclear...***

#### **DO...**

- Encourage the child to talk as much as possible. The more they practice the better they will become.
- Make sure the child can see your face clearly when you are talking to him. This will help them to see and hear how you make the sounds.
- Accept any attempt at a word as a good try then repeat back the word to them clearly and emphasise the target sound.
- Practice in front of a mirror. Use this to try out tricky sounds and see if the child can copy them. Talk about where your tongue is when you make the sound.
- Most children know when you don’t understand them so be honest and say you don’t understand. Be sympathetic and/or put the blame on yourself by saying ‘my ears aren’t working properly today’

#### **DON’T...**

- Don’t make a child repeat their tricky sound over and over
- Don’t let other children make fun of his attempts at words
- Don’t necessarily expect the child to be able to say a sound straight away in a word, sentence or in different situations straight away, even if they can say the sound on its own. This takes time to develop.

### ***Encouraging Generalisation in Class:***

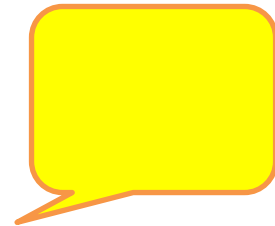
- ✓ Try to incorporate any carryover work into regular class work and routine
- ✓ Try to target a small amount of target words during specific activities e.g. reading.
- ✓ Only remind the child in a 1:1 situation to avoid damaging self esteem
- ✓ Use a cue card or bookmark to remind the child of the target sound (examples overleaf)
- ✓ Make a scrapbook/poster of pictures containing the target sound (examples overleaf)
- ✓ Play the ‘I spy’ game with the target sound

## Visual Supports

### Speech Sound Reminders

#### SPEECH SOUND REMINDERS FOR:

I AM WORKING REALLY HARD ON THIS SPEECH SOUND  
BUT I CAN'T DO IT ALONE!



I MIGHT NEED YOU TO:

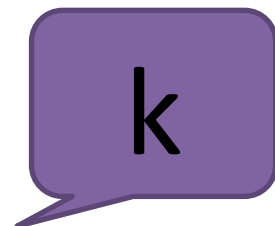
- Point to my speech sound which can be kept on my desk.
- Encourage me to take my time and use slow and steady talking if I have a lot to say.
- 
- 

THE TINIEST AMOUNT OF PRACTICE GOES A LONG WAY FOR ME

#### SPEECH SOUND REMINDERS FOR:

*Joe Bloggs*

I AM WORKING REALLY HARD ON THIS SPEECH SOUND  
BUT I CAN'T DO IT ALONE!



I MIGHT NEED YOU TO:

- Point to my speech sound when I forget, which can be kept on my desk.
- Remind me to think about using the /k/ sound when I am reading to you.
- Repeat back what I have said (if I forget to use my sound) and to see if I notice.
- Encourage me to take my time and use slow and steady talking if I have a lot to say.

THE TINIEST AMOUNT OF PRACTICE GOES A LONG WAY FOR ME!

## What is a scrapbook?

A scrapbook is a book that you and your child can make together by sticking in pictures and photos of words starting with particular sounds' (you can look in catalogues, such as Argos), magazines, old books or family photos and pick out pictures that the child wants to talk about. Start with easier sounds. /m/ is a good one to start with as the child might like to find pictures of: Mummy, monkeys, mermaids, Mickey Mouse, maps etc. Spend a week finding and talking about these pictures, and then introduce a new sound, such as /b/ or /d/. You could then look at the sounds highlighted in yellow on your speech wheel to help you decide which sound to do next.

### How do we practise?

Look at the scrapbook together and talk about each picture, emphasising the special sound at the beginning. If the child doesn't get the sound quite right don't correct them (as we want to build their confidence), but model the correct way back, putting a bit more emphasis on the sounds that were unclear. For instance, if they say 'an' for 'man', you can say, "It's a **mmm**an" exaggerating the /m/ sound. Remember to say the pure sound i.e. /m/ is pronounced 'mmm' not /muh/ or /em/.

### What do I do next?

If the child has confidently worked through the yellow sounds on the wheel then you may wish to move onto the sounds in red; /c/k/, /f/ and /s/ are ones we suggest you start with. The child may find some of these sounds harder, so you may initially need to do more of the talking. For instance, if they say 'pish' instead of 'fish', you can say: "That's right, it's a fish, it begins with the sound /f/. Let's make a /f/ sound together, - fffff." Remember to say the pure sound e.g. /f/ is 'fff' not /fuh/ or /eff/.



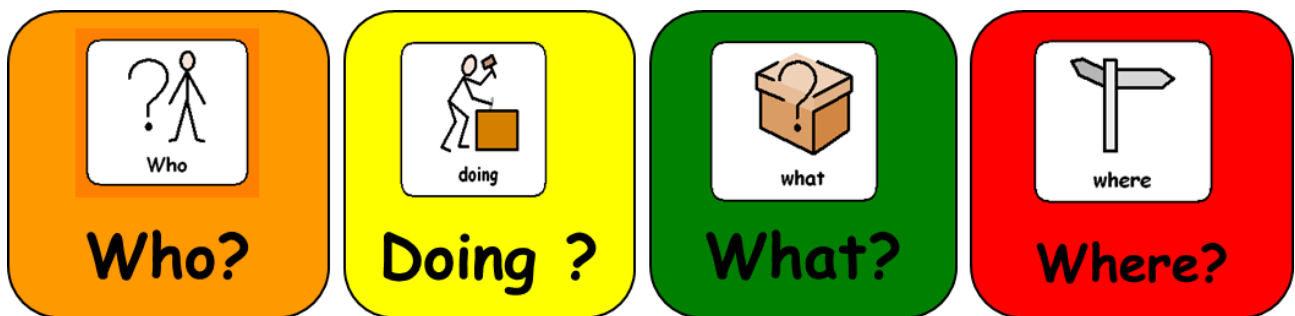
# Supporting Sentence Building in Children with SLCN

Difficulties with spoken language skills can present in a number of different ways including, difficulty putting words together to make a sentence, difficulty using accurate word endings e.g. verb tenses and plurals, limited vocabulary development and difficulty sequencing ideas to make a story. These difficulties will impact on their literacy development.

## What can you do to help?

- Give the child **extra time** to express themselves and try not to interrupt.
- Use **visual aids** to help conversation with the child e.g. photos, picture books, objects.
- For children with more severe difficulties, a **home-school diary** will enable parents and school staff to record information that the child is likely to talk about, for example weekend activities.
- **Modelling:** model language appropriate to the child's ability e.g. with a younger child name objects and actions during everyday situations, for an older child model the use of connectives i.e. "and" "so" "because".
- **Adding language:** add words to the child's sentences to help develop their spoken language e.g. child says "kick ball", adult replies "the boy is kicking the ball". As the child's skills develop, start to model describing words and connectives.
- **Repeat** the child's sentence back to them using the correct structure e.g. "him falled down them", "yes he's fallen down the steps". With older children, **explain word/word endings** and why they are important i.e. "when there is more than one object you add an 's' to the end"
- **Prompt** them with sequencing words such as *and.....because.....*
- **Role reversal:** give the child instructions such as "colour the hat blue" or "where's the cat's tail?" then swap over and let the child be the "teacher"
- **Sabotage technique:** set up a situation which encourages the child to make some form of comment or request e.g. the adult keeps some of the pieces of a puzzle back or only gives the child a small amount of juice so that they will want more.

**Colourful Semantics** is a programme which uses colours to teach the different elements within a sentence:



The aim of the programme is to help children with Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN) to organise words into simple sentences. By using colours to do this, children with SLCN can sequence the words in the right order, extend the sentences they are using and develop a wider vocabulary.

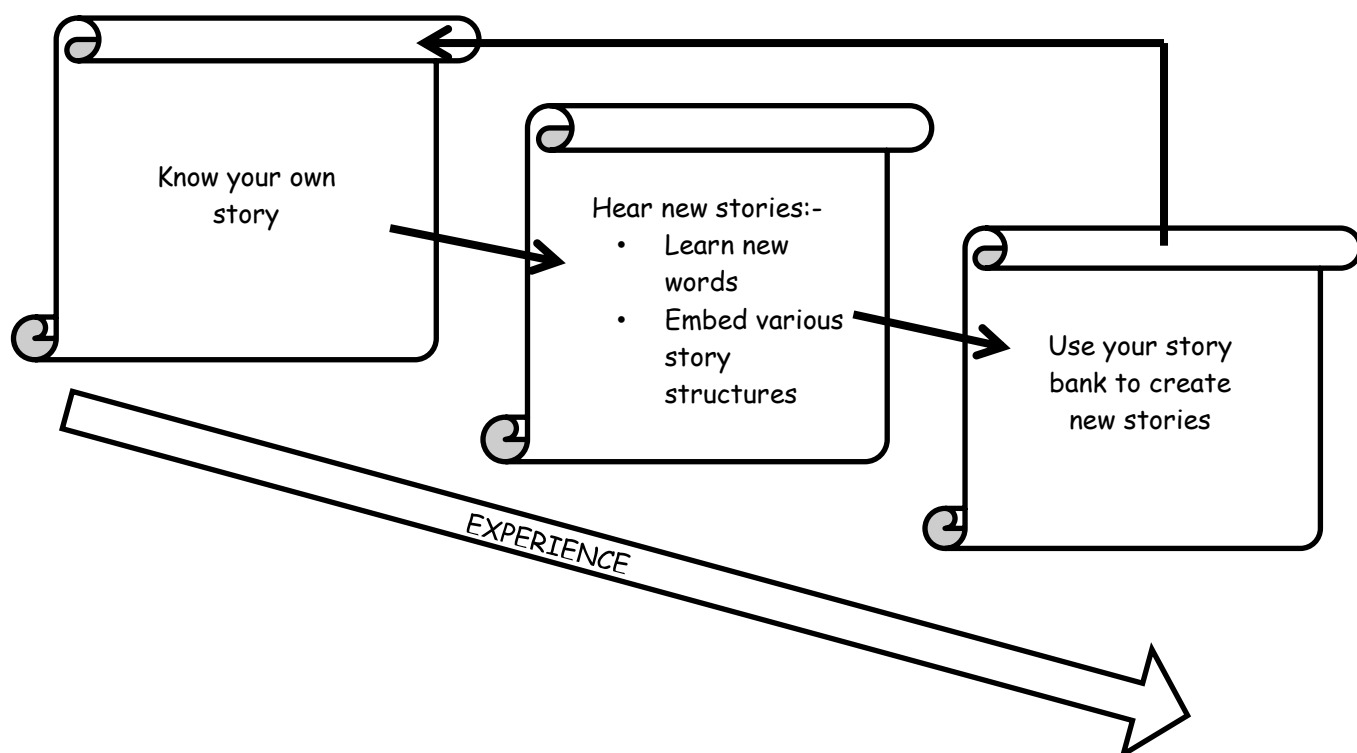
### Using Colourful Semantics in the classroom

- ✓ Use the ideas on the book mark and sentence strip to support your child when they are reading and writing.
- ✓ Make a vocabulary book to help your child store sight vocabulary when doing written work. Instead of using an alphabetical index use the **who**, **doing**, **what** and **where** symbol cards. Your child will then be able to make sentences for written work more easily.
- ✓ Consider ways to use the Colourful Semantics colours in displays and around the classroom: (e.g. display about a cookery lesson: '**What** ingredients did you need to make the biscuits?' **flour**, **sugar**, **butter**).
- ✓ When looking at photos from educational visits/photos taken around your school use the **who**, **doing**, **what** and **where** symbol cards to help your child talk about what they have seen ('**Where** did you go?' **What** was the man wearing?')

## Supporting Oral to Written Narrative Skills

### in Children with SLCN

We organise our experience in the form of narrative in order to help us to understand events, predict what might happen and make decisions. By recognising recurring patterns and boundaries between routines, children can place themselves on a timeline relating to the past, the present and the future. The development of narrative skills can be organised into these key stages, from the understanding of familiar sequences within the pupil's own routine, to the ability to use their imagination to talk and write creatively.

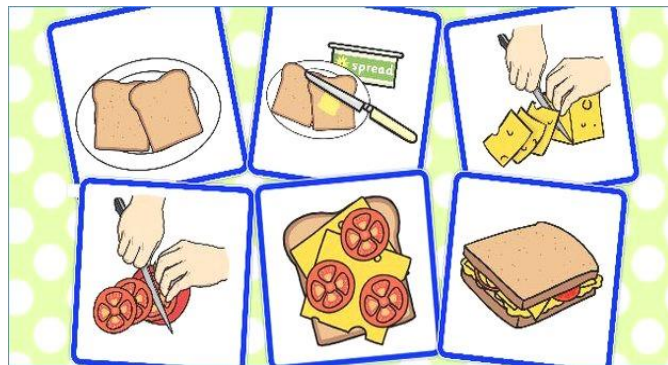



Children with SLCN can be supported within the classroom at each of the stages. You will see that many of the strategies are already well-established within the classroom, but children with SLCN are particularly likely to benefit from repetition and visual strategies. Strategies and ideas that can be supported at home are included where you see the 🏠 symbol.

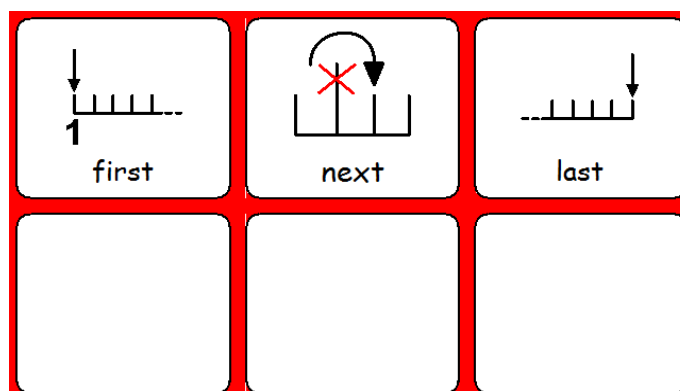



## Step 1 – Helping the child to ‘know their own story’

- **Sequence pictures of the child’s own routine** and then arrange pictures of familiar sequences into the correct order (e.g. how to make a sandwich).
- **Omit pictures from a sequence** and see if the child can tell you what’s missing.



- **Work on spatial concepts first, next, last** (e.g. placing toy characters in a bus queue ). Then, work on temporal concepts (e.g. ask them to point to the first/next/last picture). Support visually e.g. with Makaton, ‘Communicate In Print’/Wigit symbols.



- **Use a visual timetable (or even basic drawings) to talk about what you are doing before/after an activity** (e.g. what you are doing before/after snack time). Also use it to talk about completed activities . Check understanding by asking the child to point to an activity that you did before/after another activity. (e.g. “What did we do before snack time?”)



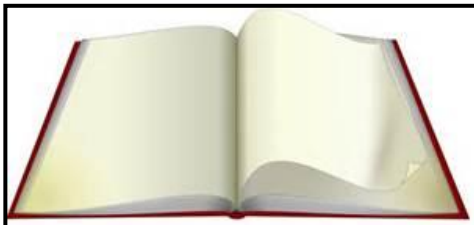
## **Step 2 – Learning new words and developing an understanding of story frameworks**

- Play is the basis for extending, adapting and inventing new sequences. **Provide opportunities to play with small world figures and model pretend play sequences** 🏠. Sabotage play so that object substitutes are needed (e.g. a box becomes a mountain).
- **Retell simple story sequences**; ensure that the story pictures are placed in front of the child, to reduce demand on auditory memory.
- Extend **reasoning and prediction skills by placing all but the last picture down**. Ask the child to make one or more predictions about what might happen next.
- **Use visuals** e.g. diagrams, thinking/mind maps to extend the ability to discuss/provide alternative endings
- The **“Talk for Writing” approach by Pie Corbett** is strongly recommended due to the high level of repetition and visual support in the form of actions and story maps. Parents can play their part by reading stories to their child as well as hearing them read 🏠.
- **Send books (or story sacks where available) home** for a week or two before they are introduced to the whole class as a way of pre-teaching the story 🏠.

## **Step 3 – Creating new stories**

- **Use a story plan to ‘thought shower’ ideas for a story in a group.**
- **Provide a visual story framework.** Start with a simple framework (e.g. who/doing/what/where/when).
- Extend the visual story framework to match the child’s developing ideas.

# Story Prompt



The End

### **Key Commercial Resources:**

The Black Sheep Press has developed a series of narrative packs which are an excellent resource for working with children in schools.

- ✓ They offer a highly structured programme based on meaningful activities
- ✓ They use colour, symbol support to visually reinforce understanding
- ✓ Introduces story components and builds them up into a story structure
- ✓ Moves from retelling to story generation
- ✓ Are session planned with resources for school staff to run as a group

# CLASS BASED STRATEGIES

**What can staff do to help?**

## Part 2

## Supporting Attention and Listening in the Classroom

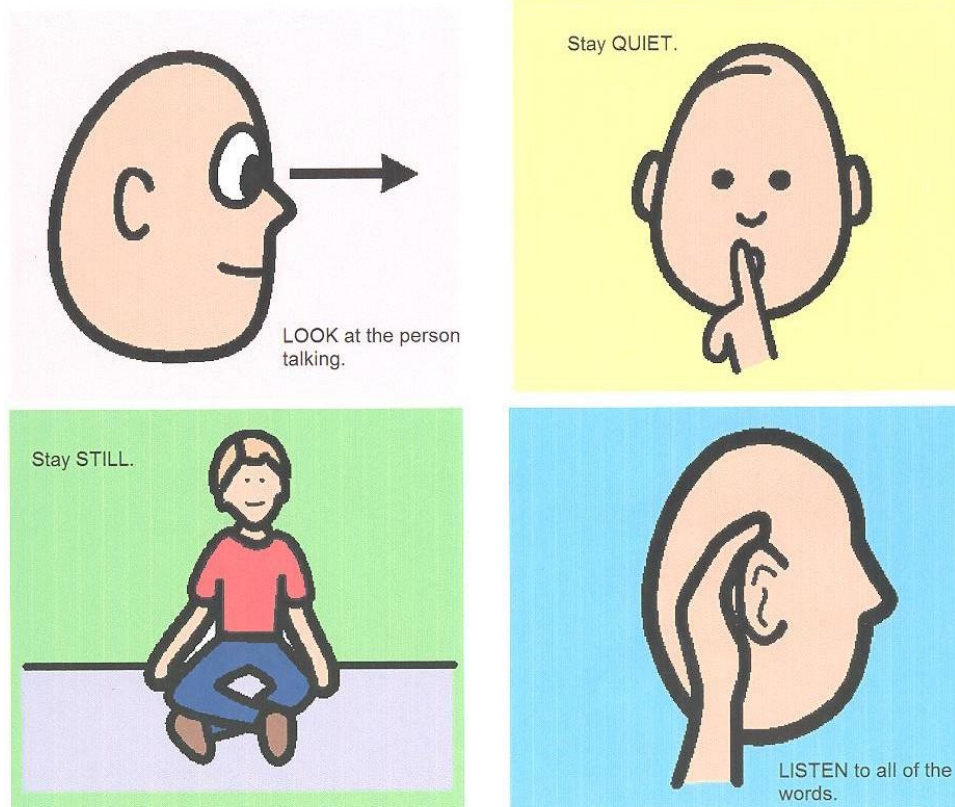
Attention and listening are important foundation skills for the development of successful communication and language.

Having good attention and listening requires more than just one skill – it involves a combination of 4 main behaviours, including:

1. Looking at the person who is talking
2. Staying still
3. Staying quiet
4. Listening to ALL of the words

Simply telling a child to do 'good listening' is not always helpful. By breaking it down into individual behaviours, it allows the child to understand what they actually need to do to be a good listener.

Visual cue cards can be used to reinforce the behaviour that you are asking for. You could use stickers on a reward chart when a child demonstrates a particular behaviour.

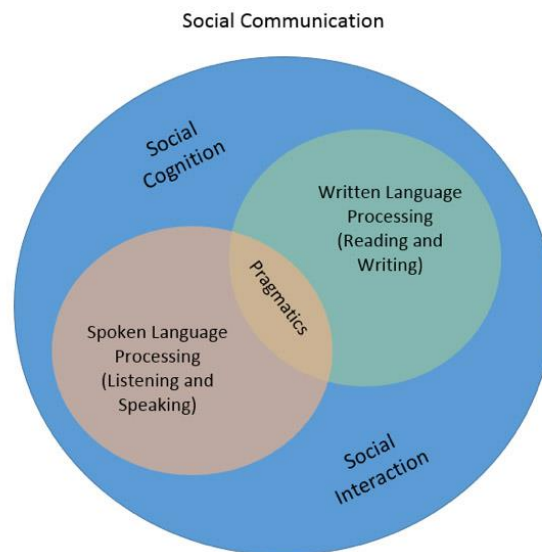


## Top 10 Tips for Good Attention and Listening

- 1. Keep visual distractions to a minimum** e.g. remove all other items from the child's work space
- 2. Monitor and reduce the level of background noise** e.g. keep the classroom door closed if people often walk past. Consider having a classroom noise indicator
- 3. Teach the 4 rules for good listening and display visual reminders within the classroom** e.g. see visual cue cards attached to refer to (copy and cut out)
- 4. Use the child's name to gain their attention before giving information** – “Jacob? .....go and sit on the carpet”
- 5. Use visual and auditory prompts in relation to particular activities** e.g. a particular piece of music at 'tidy up time' or transition between curriculum areas (e.g. literacy to numeracy)
- 6. Use a visual reminder within groups to show who is the speaker** e.g. pass a bean bag around the group – only the child holding it can speak
- 7. Give the children key words or information to listen for at the beginning of the lesson** e.g. giving the child a tangible reason for listening is more likely to maintain attention levels
- 8. Use your voice to attract and maintain attention** e.g. vary pitch, tone and volume/sing parts of a lesson
- 9. Ensure that the children with attention and listening difficulties are seated at the front of the class facing the teacher.** Be aware not to make the child 'stand out' from the rest of the class by seating them by themselves
- 10. If you are unsure if a child has listened to an instruction, ask them to verbally repeat what they have been asked to do.** You will be able to identify which parts of the instruction they have not retained and fill in the gaps

# Supporting Children with Social Communication Difficulties

We use the term "**Social communication**" to describe all of the skills we need when using language to communicate and engage with others. Social communication encompasses the following skills:



**Social interaction** refers to the ability to acknowledge that other people are social beings. Social interaction includes (but is not limited to):

- Using language for a range of different functions - providing information, asking questions, negotiating, making suggestions, and seeking clarification.
- Ability to make and maintain a variety of friendships & relationships.
- Social reasoning and competence. In the classroom this may sometimes present as a difficulty to understand another child's point of view and put themselves into other people's shoes.
- Conflict resolution.

**Social cognition** describes the ability to:

- Connect with, and understand the emotions of yourself and others. Although many of these children may appear to understand and use emotional vocabulary appropriately (within certain situations), they often struggle to use it functionally, and spontaneously apply it to real life situations e.g. playground conflict
- Understand the nuances of language - sarcasm, jokes, puns, metaphors & idioms, words with double meaning.
- Make inferences and predictions from contextual cues – e.g. “five minutes left and then we’re going to sit on the carpet for a story”. This instruction implies that the child has five minutes to complete their task before moving on; however they might not understand this, and what is expected of them before they move on (e.g. finish their task, put away their book and then sit on the carpet).
- Understand shared and assumed knowledge - how much information the listener needs in order to understand the conversation/situation



**Pragmatics** is how we use language in social situations, using unwritten rules based on the context. For example, a child may use language differently when speaking to a peer versus a parent. Pragmatic skills include (but are not limited to):

- Conversational skills – a desire to communicate, initiating & finishing conversations, turn taking, appropriacy of & maintaining a topic, and identifying & repairing conversational breakdown.
- Initiating interactions appropriately - social greetings and how to join in conversations.
- **Understanding** non-verbal communication - facial expression, gesture, proximity and distance (personal space)
- **Using** non-verbal communication skills appropriately - eye contact, facial expression, gesture, proximity and distance (personal space)

Children with SLCN can experience difficulties in any or all of these areas. They may also be part of, or co-occur with other conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder, social communication disorder, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury, etc.

### **What can you do to help?**

- **Reduce background noise and distractions** when possible (i.e. do you need all equipment on, or can you turn things off to reduce noise? such as fans, computers, machines, etc. Or pulling the blinds in the classroom if there is something going on outside?)
- **Considering seating positions** - create a seating plan to minimise the chance of distractions for that student. It may be beneficial for them to sit at the front with a clear view of the teacher and whiteboard, etc.
- **Make a note of anything specific that your student may find particularly distracting** (be mindful, for future reference) – fans, blinds moving in a breeze, light reflections, etc. This may be addressed by simply changing their seating position.
- **Work for short periods of time** - Don't expect the student to listen for more than 10 minutes without doing, thinking or talking about something. This keeps the student actively involved in learning.
- **Allow suitable learning breaks** – notify the student where/when each break will be. Helps to reduce anxiety and stress, and increases focus per task (i.e. 10 min task, 2 minute break, maybe relating to their motivators).
- **Vary the activity to maintain interest** - alternate activities between listening and doing.


- **Speak slowly and pause between thoughts/sentences.** Students listen more effectively when the speaker slows down. This also gives them more time to process the information heard.
- **Give instructions in the order they are expected to be carried out,** such as “Put your book away and wash your hands”. This makes information easier to process, and reduces confusion.
- **Use their name to gain their attention before giving information** – “Jacob? ..... go and sit on the carpet”
- **Adapt your language level to suit them** – Try to keep information short, simple, and to the point. You can do this by **chunking information** into small processable parts.
- **Chunk Information** – information needs to be given in short chunks (only one or two instructions at a time), with repetition and time for processing.
- **10 second rule** – Give students a minimum of 10 seconds to process information before giving a response. If they do not respond after this time then repeat the information exactly as it was said the first time, and give them another 10 seconds. If again they do not respond, then rephrase the question/simplify the information to make it easier for the student to understand.

- **Classroom rules** - Have clear classroom rules to support all children understanding what is expected of them e.g. hand up to ask questions.



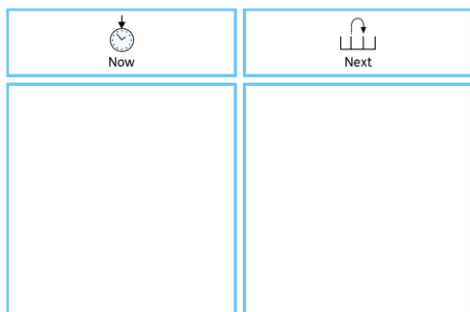
- **Avoid using ambiguous language** such as idioms, metaphors, sarcasm, jokes, puns, words with double meaning. If you can't avoid using ambiguous language then make sure you explain it.

- **Use positive language** focusing on what you want the child to do, rather than what you don't want them to do.

YOUR WORDS		MATTER
INSTEAD OF...	TRY	
	Be quiet.	Can you use a softer voice?
	What a mess!	It looks like you had fun! How can we clean up?
	Do you need help?	I'm here to help if you need me.
	I explained how to do this yesterday.	Maybe I can show you another way.
	Do I need to separate you?	Could you use a break?
	Stop crying.	It's okay to cry.
	Do you have any questions?	What questions do you have?
	You're OK.	How are you feeling?
	It's not that hard.	You can do hard things.
	We don't talk like that.	Please use kind words.

→ Use different visuals to support & generalise a variety of skills into specific contexts. Using visual supports also helps to reduce anxiety and misunderstandings that may occur at times of transitions (end/start of lessons), and unexpected changes in routine during the school day. Some suggested visuals include:

### Now Next Boards



### First Next Last Boards



### Visual timetables



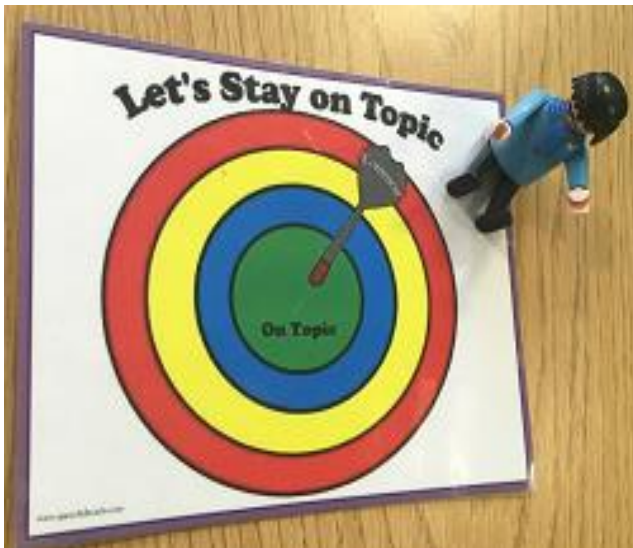
## Task Management Boards



→ **Seek clarification** by getting students to tell you what they need to do. You can do this as a whole class by choosing a student at random to reiterate what was said, or use it directly with children you know have difficulties (on an individual basis).

→ **Help the children to stay on topic** by using visual reminders (e.g. 'Topic Maintenance Boards'), and scheduling time to talk about special interests (e.g. 'Special Time Boards').

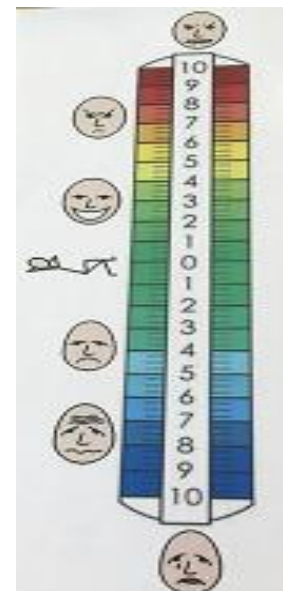
## Topic Maintenance Boards



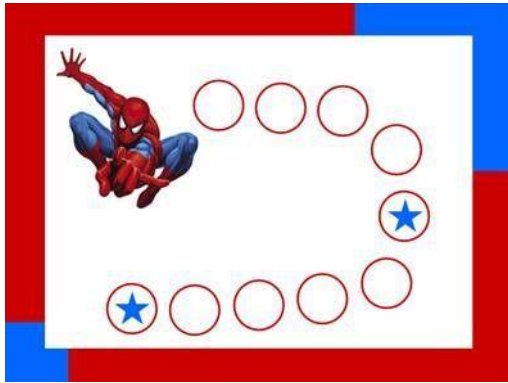
## Special Time Boards



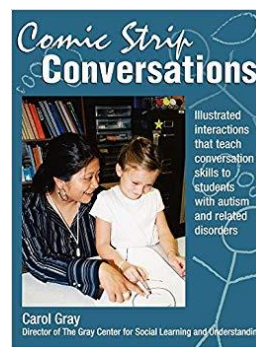
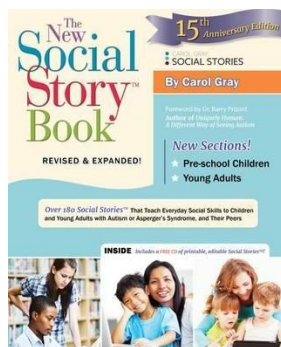
→ **Help the children to identify and express how they feel** by using an emotions scale, and turn emotions into more concrete concepts.



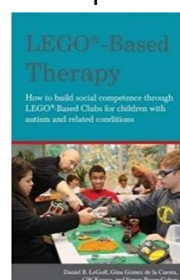
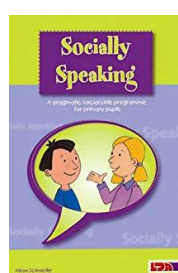
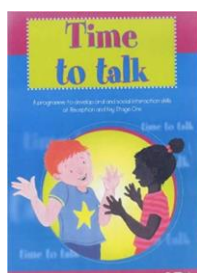
- **Make how you are feeling clear and explicit** – don't expect the child to accurately interpret what you are thinking / feeling from your facial expression and tone of voice alone.
- **Use reward systems** that relate to the child's interests. This will increase motivation and encourage positive participation during a variety of activities in the classroom during the day. These can be made to suit using photographs or pictures, or are purchasable from numerous websites.



- **Work through misunderstandings / conflicts as they arise** e.g. bullying. If the child is unable to say about what happened to them then it may help to have them draw a picture or use other methods e.g. Social Stories & Comic Strip Conversations.



- **Have a safe space within the classroom** where the child can go as and when they need. (e.g. a tent or cosy corner).
- **Introduce small groups focussing on building social skills** (published programmes include Time to Talk, Socially Speaking, Lego Therapy, and Little Explorers from Socially Thinking)



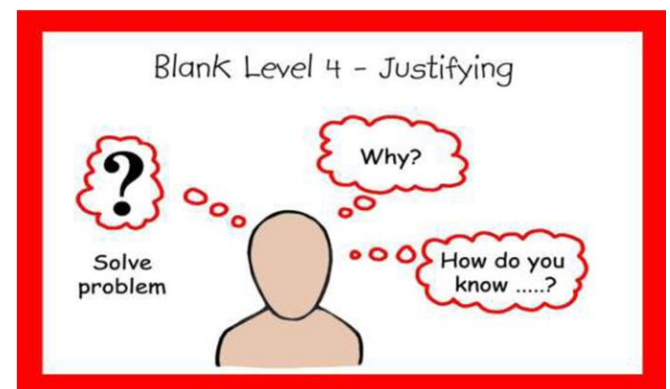
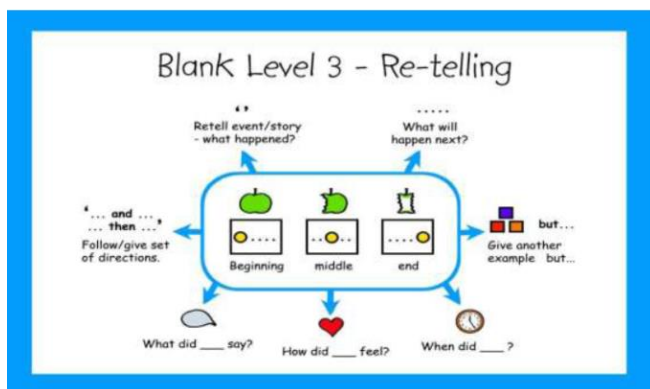
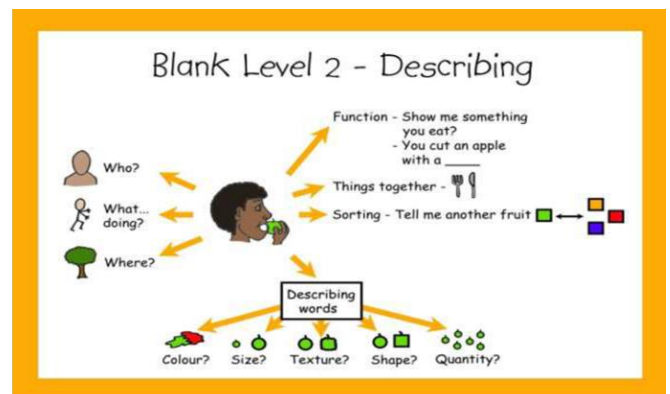
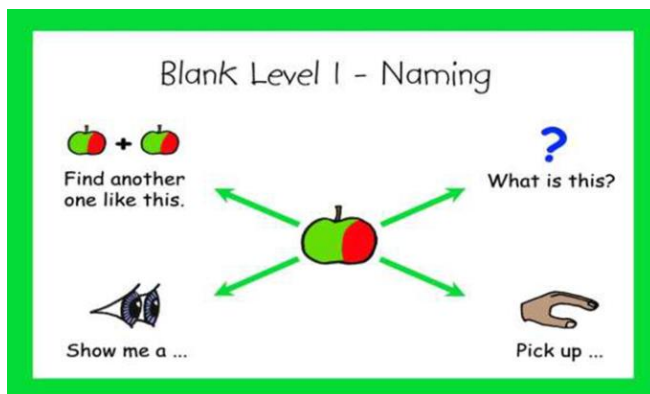
# Supporting Verbal Reasoning Skills

In typically developing children, understanding naturally develops from the concrete ('here and now') to the abstract ('how' and 'why') with minimal direct instruction. Many children with a range of identified SEN have particular difficulties in moving from concrete to more abstract understanding, due to gaps in one or more areas of their development. Additionally, children with less obvious oral difficulties may begin to struggle when they start to read, gradually improving decoding skills, but struggling with reading comprehension.

## How to Help – Identification

The Blank Language Model (Blank, Rose and Berlin, 1978) has divided verbal reasoning into four key stages. The model moves from understanding and answering concrete questions to more abstract questions. In this way, it provides a tool that allows us to identify at what level universal strategies and/or more targeted intervention is needed.

The four levels are simplified and summarised as follows:



(From **Eiklan** - Henrietta McLachlan & Liz Elks, 2010)

## How to help – Targeted Interventions

The '*Language for Thinking*' programme (Parsons and Branagan, 2016 - see below for purchase information) is based on Blank's model and can be used by Teachers or TAs as an informal assessment and intervention tool. It relates to the Blank Levels as shown below:

Blank Level	Language For Thinking Level	Approximate Age
2	A	3 - 4 years
3	B	4 - 5 years
4	C	5 - 6 years

The resource is appropriate to use with many children, but most progress can be expected with children who have understanding of concrete language at a three information carrying word level, have some understanding of question forms (who, where, what) and the ability to learn from pictures rather than objects. The informal assessment tool provided in the programme identifies the appropriate level of questioning for each child, but the same picture resources can be used when working with a group of children, it is the question type that is varied.

The tables below give a summary of question and activity ideas at Language for Thinking levels B-C (e.g. Blank levels 3-4). They are arranged in an approximate order of difficulty from easier to more demanding tasks:

### ***Blanks Level 3/Language for Thinking Level B***

The child needs to take into account the whole context. They will need to use world knowledge and experience to "read between the lines" and to make connections between events.

<p><b><i>Sequencing &amp; Narrative:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Put pictures into a sequence and tell the story</li> <li>- read a book together and then retell the story</li> <li>- Retell a known story</li> <li>- Role play a familiar sequence, either acting it out together or using play people</li> <li>- News time: recalling events to the class (e.g. what you did at the weekend)</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Put yourself in someone else's shoes:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start with the child's own experience, then move on to another person (e.g. a character in a story)</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Emotive Language:</i></b></p> <p>Express the characters feelings in a story (work on emotional vocabulary may be needed first)</p>	<p><b><i>Prediction:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remember what hap[pens] next in a familiar story</li> <li>- Predict what may happen next (using their own knowledge of cause &amp; effect, routine, &amp; life experiences)</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Comparing Items:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- play games such as "Guess Who?", or "Odd One Out"</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Talk About Words:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Tell me about ..."</li> <li>- "What is a .."</li> <li>- Find links between objects or pictures (e.g. semantic link type activities)</li> </ul>
--	--	---	--	---	---

### **Blanks Level 4/Language for Thinking Level C**

Answers must be explained and/or justified. Key questions are “Why?” and “How do you know?”

<b>Justifying a prediction or decision:</b> - “Why didn’t she cross the road?” - “How can you tell ...” - “Which is better, A or b?”	<b>Identify the cause of an event:</b> - “Why did that happen?”	<b>Problem solving:</b> - “What could you do if it doesn’t work?”	<b>Problem solving outside own experience:</b> - “What could they do?”	<b>Inference from observation:</b> - “How do we know that he is feeling ...”	<b>Explain why something cannot be done:</b> - “Why can’t they just do...”
---	--	--	---	---	---



### **How to help – Universal Strategies**

#### **If the child has difficulty in identifying the main point:**

- Prompt by saying “You said...Tell me more about that”
- “You have told me lots of things. What is the most important point?”
- “Use the word (x) in your answer”
- If he has difficulty sequencing his response, ask him “What happens first/next/last”.

#### **If he doesn’t seem to answer the question you’ve asked:**

- Stop him and repeat the question, emphasising the key words
- Highlight relevant parts of the picture/text
- Ask questions from an earlier level / ask a concrete question

#### **If he gets the idea but his sentences appear muddled**

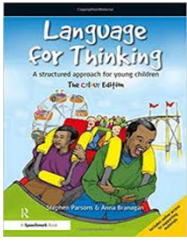
- Repeat what he has said, but with appropriate sentence structure

#### **\* Top tip:**

Challenging behaviour is more likely to occur in children with verbal reasoning difficulties as they lack reasoning abilities to predict consequences and/or to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. If a child is functioning at Blank level 3 (Language for Thinking B) they may not understand level 4 questions used to discuss the situation (e.g. ‘why did you do x?’). In this case, ask a level 3 question instead such as ‘Tell me what happened’ in order to begin the discussion around behaviour and model answers at level 4.



## Key resources:



**Language for Thinking** (Parsons and Branagan, 2016) Speechmark Publishing, £35 approx. Suggested age range 4-11+



### **Mr Goodguess** Black Sheep Press £40.

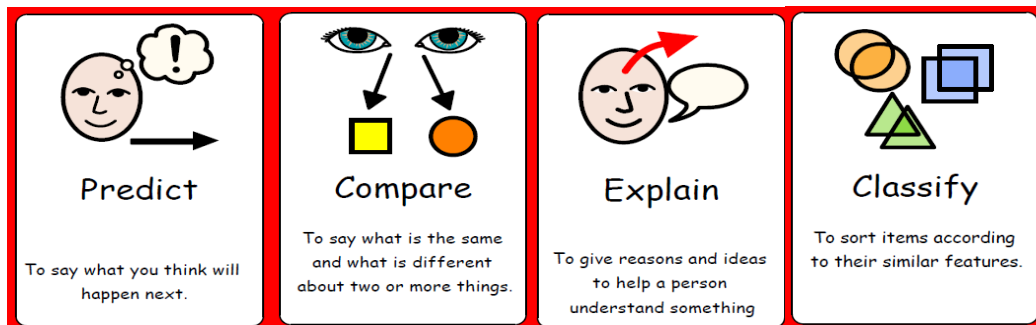
Based on the Blank model, Mr Goodguess involves the adult and child looking at illustrated scenarios and working out what 'Mr Goodguess' thinks. The title 'Mr Goodguess' conveys that we do not always know 'for certain' but some guesses are better than others. The suggested age range is 6-11 years.

### **Twinkl**

Twinkl provide questions at Blank levels 1-4 based on popular stories such as The Gingerbread Man, The Gruffalo. There are also picture scenes with questions alongside, based on everyday scenarios (search 'Blanks Levels').

### **Communicate in Print**

Online (formerly 'Widget') – Does your school have this resource? If yes, then you can download a collection of cards to support understanding and development of verbal reasoning skills vocabulary.



### **Assessment**

The Test of Abstract Language Comprehension (TALC) is available from Elklan. This resource is predominantly an assessment for verbal reasoning skills, but also includes examples of differentiated questions for a range of curriculum subjects (Please let your therapist know if you have/are using this resource with any of our children).

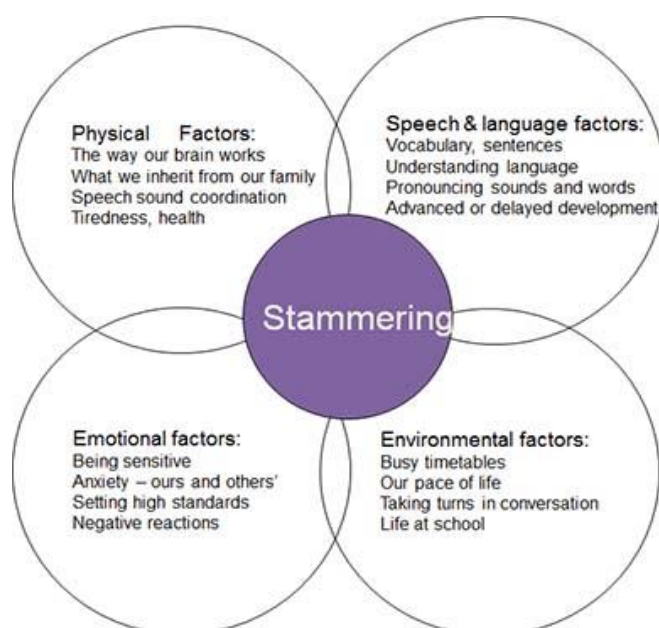
### **Training**

A workshop on verbal reasoning runs at the Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre, details are provided to the SENCO.

## Supporting Children who Stammer in the Classroom

It is essential that children who stammer feel supported in the classroom environment by teaching staff and their peers. The experience of stammering in class can undermine a child's confidence as a speaker and damage their self-image generally. Therefore the teacher has a key role to play in supporting the child to feel comfortable about stammering in the classroom environment and that they will be accepted and supported.

The reason why a child may stammer is varied, and is probably not caused by one single thing. It is more likely that stammering is due to many different factors and therefore we use a multifactorial model to explore what might be causing a child to stammer, and what can possibly be changed to support them with their speech. The Framework of Stammering below outlines some of the factors which may impact upon stammering.



Stammering can take many forms. The most typical features are repetition of whole words, single sounds, prolongation of sounds, blocking of sounds, facial tension, extra body movements and a disrupted breathing pattern.

Hesitations can be a normal feature of speech. This includes repetition of phrases, restarting a sentence, and using "umm" and "err". Children may also present with word finding and / or processing difficulties. All of these are not usually considered to be stammering behaviours.

We do know that stammering is an unpredictable and variable condition. Children will react differently to their speech difficulty and will benefit from different forms of support at different times. Stammering also varies in severity and a child may have fluent periods and then revert to stammering for no apparent reason.

If you are concerned about a child in your class who may be stammering then please contact your **Link Therapist** in the first instance. Therapists will liaise and support teaching staff as much as possible as this positively impacts upon our ability to help the child who stammers.

### What can you do to help?

- Notice when the child is **speaking confidently and encourage as much talking at this time** as possible.
- Remember, fluency should not be the goal. It is more important to encourage the child to **develop a confident attitude to talking**, being an **effective communicator**, and feeling that what they say is of importance, rather than how they say it.
- A stammer can be variable and it may be necessary to **check in regularly** with the child as to how they are currently feeling, and whether they feel able to speak in certain situations.
- If the child is having a difficult time with their talking then it is a good idea to **reduce the number of questions they are being asked** as this can be seen as a demand and possibly make the stammer worse, or make the child worry about their talking. **Help them by making more comments and asking fewer questions.**

## **Practical classroom ideas**

**Answering the register:** Be flexible and let children decide how they wish to respond e.g. by putting their hand up or standing up as their name is called. Another idea is to let each child respond by saying “hello” or “good morning” in different languages which they can use each day or change as feels comfortable to them. Take the focus off the responses by having an activity for the class to complete whilst the register is being taken e.g. a word search.

**Reading aloud:** Reading in unison with one other child, as a group, or as a whole class will be easier for the child who stammers rather than reading alone. Ask the child who they feel most comfortable to be paired with. Let the child who stammers have an early turn to stop anxiety building up. If the child is aware of their stammer then you could discuss what they prefer.

**Classroom discussions:** encourage the child who stammers to have a go in a pair initially, then a small group and work up to participating in front of the whole class. Agree on a signal that the child can give when they are ready to contribute. Avoid asking the child at random as their fear of talking may be increased by this rather than there being a set agreed point when they are to talk.

### **DO...**

- ✓ **Create a safe space** to stammer and encourage **openness** about stammering.
- ✓ **Model** good speech and language. **Insert pauses** before you talk and **take your time** to speak in a relaxed, unhurried pace.
- ✓ Ensure the child who stammers is given an opportunity to answer. Ensure children **take turns** and don't get rewarded for calling out.

- ✓ Allow the child plenty of time for their contribution or answer; this can be useful for lots of children in the classroom (e.g. children who require time to process language) therefore it is good to encourage **'thinking time'** before the child speaks as a general strategy.
- ✓ Maintain **eye contact, listen** and use **normal body language** to show you are relaxed.
- ✓ Try to establish a **calm classroom environment**.
- ✓ Make it clear that you are listening and **that what the child is saying is more important than how they are saying it**.
- ✓ **Deal with any unkind or bullying behaviour immediately**
- ✓ Let children know that **it is ok to stammer**. The child may even want to talk to their classmates about their stammer, or may be happy for you to do this – but check first.
- ✓ Encourage the child by **praising them for things they do well** (e.g. listening, being polite), **but** don't treat them in a way that is obviously different to other children.
- ✓ If the **child is aware of their stammer** then it can be a good idea to **discuss their talking with them (with parents' permission)**. Find out if there are **situations that are difficult** for them, or if there are things that they would like to do more of (e.g. taking part in classroom discussions) but they might need a bit of support with, then you can work on building their confidence to give things a go in small steps.
- ✓ **Raise awareness of stammering and the strategies to use with all staff**, including cover and supply teachers, teaching assistants, office staff and lunchtime staff, etc.

### **DON'T...**

- ✗ **DO not** make remarks like: "slow down", "take a deep breath", "relax", or "think about what you are going to say, then say it." We often say these things to children because slowing down, relaxing or thinking about what we are going to say helps **us** when we feel like we're having a problem tripping over our words. Stammering though is a different kind of speaking problem and this kind of advice is simply not helpful to the child who stammers.

- ✘ Don't ask the child to change the way they speak.
- ✘ Don't tell the child to hurry up and don't signal impatience by looking at your watch, or getting on with another task whilst the child is speaking.
- ✘ Try not to tell the child to slow down or take a deep breath as most children who stammer say this is less helpful as they usually know what to do but may be struggling to do it – instead you should give them time and model a good pace of talking yourself.
- ✘ Try to not complete sentences or words for the child, allow them to finish them for themselves, even if this takes a little extra time.

Please see the British Stammering Association specialist education website for further information, support & advice:

<http://www.stammeringineducation.net/england/primary>

---

**For specific resources to support all areas of SLCN including published programmes, books, games, websites and iPad apps please refer to:**

***'Speech and Language Therapy Resource and Support Guide September 2019'***

