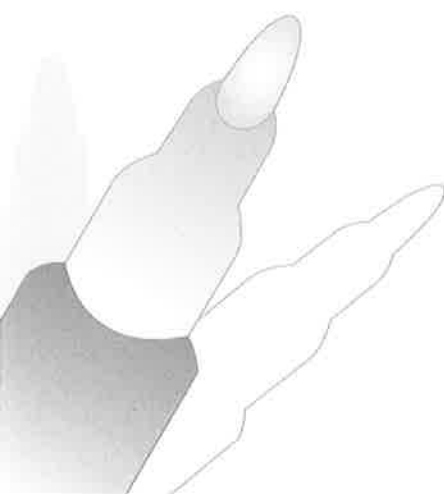




Case Study: Specific Language Impairment

Alexander is a five year old boy who attends his local mainstream primary school. Alexander's mother reports that he met all his developmental milestones at the appropriate times but that his speech development was an issue from the early months as he didn't babble or make other noises in the same way as other children of his age and was always unusually quiet or clingy. His first words appeared at about three years of age. When Alex started at nursery he was referred to the speech and language therapy service.

Alex has bonded well with all members of his family and although he can play well with other children he often feels more comfortable with adults. At school he appears shy but is slowly beginning to participate more with his peers. Recently he has begun to display tantrum behaviour at home that is probably linked to his frustration around communication. In the past few months he has started to put three to four words together and will repeat what he has heard at school whilst playing on his own. His teachers and family members can understand him some of the time but there continues to be inconsistencies in his speech. Sometimes he says words correctly but at other times they are too indistinct to recognise. If misunderstood Alex might repeat the word but then give up. With less familiar listeners he tends to be virtually silent, he does not initiate conversations at school and tends to play alongside rather than with his peer group. Alex displays excellent attention and listening skills in school but is quiet and passive in small group time and needs the support of a familiar, trusted adult in order to be able to participate. He occasionally sings but his tunes are not recognisable. He has just learned to make a pig sound but cannot imitate any other animal or car sounds. Alex's anxiety shows up in whole-class situations and his limited use of spoken language makes it very difficult for him to access the curriculum. The class teacher has voiced her concern that Alex's sensitive and shy nature along with his tendency to be anxious could lead him to not talking at all.



- develop a structured routine for children to greet each other, provide key words and phrases for those with difficulties and encourage them to use them
- encourage children, especially those with word-retrieval difficulties to express themselves in any way they can, for example, using objects, writing, drawing, gestures and encourage them to elaborate on their answer
- model and encourage the use of what, why, when, where, how questions
- flag up questions at the beginning of the lesson
- encourage children to have fun becoming 'word learners' through the use of a dictionary or creating visual maps in which children take a word and write other words that seem to relate to it
- enjoy riddles and jokes that show that words can have more than one meaning.

To support children's receptive language:

- encourage listening by getting pupils' attention before starting to speak
- ensure that children understand the context of what you are going to say
- cut down the amount of introductory talk to a maximum of ten minutes
- use shorter sentences and break information into manageable chunks
- speak slowly and clearly and insert more pauses
- emphasise key words
- ensure key words are on the board at the beginning of the lesson
- if necessary pre-teach new vocabulary and use it consistently
- encourage pupils to ask or signal when they do not understand
- encourage pupils to summarise what you've just said
- give the class plenty of opportunities to talk about shared experiences
- emphasise key words and use gestures, actions and other visual prompts such as diagrams, pictures, real objects symbols (www.widgit.com) to re-enforce what is being said
- ask the child to repeat back in their own words what you have just said and then follow this up with searching questions to ensure the child has understood
- encourage children to use gestures, writing or drawings to communicate their ideas.

(Adapted from Gross, 2002)