



FACILITATE RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE AT HOME: TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Receptive language refers to the way we process and understand information. A child with weak receptive language skills may have difficulty following directions and answering questions. Here are some strategies that can help stimulate receptive language skills.

Note: *Each child develops differently and the activities below may not meet everyone's needs. It is strongly recommended that you consult a speech therapist to ensure these activities are appropriate for your child's age and ability.*

1. Your child's learning style. A discussion with your child's teacher may help you understand the way your child learns best. *Visual learners* learn best when information is visually structured. Color coding, checklists, and picture cues help them manage information they hear. *Auditory learners* remember best when they hear information. An auditory learner may enjoy listening to a story but may hate reading alone. They may benefit from "books on tape" and may recall information best when you make up helpful rhymes or songs. *Tactile learners* are "hands on". They learn best when allowed to touch and build things.

2. When do comprehension breakdowns occur? What is going on in the environment when your child is having difficulty? For instance, some children struggle to follow direction or attend to task when there is background noise such as music, television or conversations. Turning off the television for long periods of time will allow your child to think clearly. For kids expected to do homework, an organized work space with limited visual and auditory distractions may make a huge difference in their ability to focus.

3. Strengthening Memory There is a strong correlation between **memory and emotion**. The information the brain retains best is information that is triggered by emotion and is personally relevant. For example, you may remember the lyrics to a certain song if you heard it during a particularly happy time in your life. That is why when you are teaching your child something new, it is important that the experience is positive and happy. Use activities that are fun and motivating. There is also a correlation between **memory and practice**. Exercise your child's memory by having them tell about a book you've read together or a movie you've watched. Practice recalling together using sequencing words like "first" "then" "after that..." Memory exercises can be done as conversations throughout the day. For example, in the car on the way home from the supermarket you may recall the items you've bought. If your child is old enough to engage in memory games such as concentration or matching, those are great too.

4. Basic Language Concepts These are concepts we build on as our language skills gradually develop. Children with receptive language difficulties often struggle to understand basic concepts and tend to fall behind as language becomes more demanding or complex. Be creative and create fun games and activities that will help your child master these concepts:

Prepositions: Location words such as "in" "on" "behind" "under" "next to"

Attributes and descriptions (big/little, empty/full, long/short, dirty/clean etc) Color, shape and size are important for both sentence comprehension and expansion.

Sequencing: refers to understanding events in order ("first" next" "last" "beginning" middle" "end") there are many commercially available cards and puzzles that will help with memory and sequence.

Quantity Teaching the concept of "how many?" is important. Quantity words such as "some" "all" "many" and "few" are important as well.

Categories: Learning vocabulary in categories may be helpful. Start with improving your child's ability to sort items. (e.g. cut out pictures of animals and pictures of clothes and have your child sort or glue onto separate pieces of paper.) Increase the level of difficulty by asking your child to *name* categories "a giraffe, an elephant and a monkey are all ____" Naming activities (e.g. "name 5 animals" or "name 5 things you may do at a birthday party") help both receptive

and expressive language.

5. Body Language. As busy adults we forget how important it is to stop, bend down and communicate while maintaining **eye contact**. Consider your child's perspective. It is easier to process words said at eye level rather than words spoken from way above your head. Also, enhance comprehension by using gestures such as pointing. Simple signs like those for "give me" and "finished" are easy to learn and will at times help your child understand what is said.

6. Set up for success. In some cases it is better to focus less on challenging a child and more on increasing their confidence. Ask questions you *know* they can answer and give directions you *know* they can follow. Praise and show excitement when your child responds correctly.

7. Simplify your language When you speak to your child make sure your sentences are short, clear and relevant. Children understand best when we talk about *here and now*. For example, it is easier for a child to understand the phrase "first finish your cereal and then we will go to the park" rather than a sentence such as "eat all your cereal, then get ready to go while I finish the laundry and a few other things and then we will go to the park". Information presented in **small chunks** is easier to process and remember.

8. Be predictable. Children learn best when they know what to expect. It is important to let a child know what will happen during the day especially if it is a day that differs from routine. When children are aware of their "to do list" they are generally calmer and more focused. Some kids benefit from having a list they with items they can cross off. If a child isn't reading yet this can be done with pictures. Find out more about how to use picture schedules.

9. Repeat instructions. If your child isn't following directions think of another, perhaps simplified way to say things. This is particularly helpful for children experiencing auditory processing or memory difficulties,

10. Visual supports. For many children, simply hearing information is *not* enough. There are many ways visual cues can help:

Visually organize the environment: Limit distracting stimuli. For example, clear the desk and make sure only the Homework your child needs to focus on is in front of them. If you expect your child to get dressed independently, set the clothes out in the order they are to be put on.

Visual Timers A timer such as a sand clock can help a child learn to be aware of time and thus focus on tasks that need to be completed. There are many applications you can download in which there is a visual reminder of time passing (a red circle that disappears etc).

Picture clues Visual cues in the form of picture schedules, behavior charts and adapted stories are commercially available. However, it is important to consult your child's teacher or therapists since they may already be using a particular system. It is important that you use similar tools at school and at home. Children benefit from consistency.

11. When you read with your child select simple books. It is best to select books about topics your child is interested in. As you read, point to pictures, label objects and characters and ask simple "who/what/where" questions.

12. Ask for help If you are concerned about your child's speech & language development consult a speech therapist. Don't shy away from asking questions and seeking a professional's opinion.

