

Section 4: Speech Language & Communication

Speech, language, and communication skills are the building blocks for success in reading, writing and spelling. They are also essential for thinking, learning and making sense of the world. Sharing stories with your child is a brilliant way to grow their vocabulary. Whether it's reading together or listening to audio books and podcasts, these experiences expose children to new words and ideas:

- [NI Libraries eBooks and Audio Books](#)
- [Book ideas for parents \(eani.org.uk\)](#)

Children need two key types of language skills:

- **Receptive Language:** This is about understanding what others say or what they read. It helps children follow instructions and join conversations. If your child struggles to understand spoken or written messages, they may have receptive language difficulties
- **Expressive Language:** This is how children use words to share thoughts, ask questions and interact with others. If your child finds it hard to express themselves clearly, they may also struggle with writing. Support from a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) may be helpful

Children with difficulties in either receptive or expressive language may find literacy — reading, writing and spelling — more challenging. Early support can make a big difference.

Developmental Language Difficulties

Some children may have Developmental Language Difficulties (DLD). DLD has no known cause. Children with DLD have difficulty understanding language, including:

- Difficulty following instructions
- Incorrect or off-topic responses to questions

- Difficulty listening to, remembering and understanding explanations
- Reduced ability to learn and understand vocabulary
- Problems with understanding. This may be less obvious in some children and young people but show up in their behaviour, as they develop strategies to cover up the problems they have in understanding

Children with DLD may also have difficulty expressing language, including:

- Using immature or simplistic vocabulary and grammar
- Using non-specific words such as 'stuff' and 'thingy'
- Jumbled up word order
- Difficulties finding the word they want to say
- Trouble telling a story or recounting an incident
- Using shorter and more immature sentences than others of their age

Section 4.1: Foundation Stage (Age 4-6) Speech, Language & Communication

Impact	Practical Strategies
May have difficulty getting your child's attention when you want to speak to him/her	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say his/her name before speaking • Move to the same level as your child to make eye contact
May have difficulty remembering and following instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunk information by breaking it into smaller parts, emphasising the key phrases and using pauses • Play games together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Auditory Memory and Recall Instruction Activities SEND Plan
May have difficulty paying attention long enough to hear what you are saying to him/her and may struggle to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak slowly, emphasising the key words. This helps your child to focus and understand what you are saying

<p>pay attention during language-based activities such as stories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple language when talking to your child and reduce the number of words • Use gesture to act out key words, such as - 'look', 'oh no' • Chunk information into shorter sentences • Read the same stories many times to build familiarity with new vocabulary • Use books with repeated text to encourage your child to join in the story • Play attention and listening games: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Attention and Listening Activities SEND Plan</u>
<p>May appear slow to carry out instructions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After giving an instruction, give your child time to process it, rather than expecting him/her to carry it out straight away • If your child appears to not understand the instruction, repeat it using the same words
<p>May have difficulty answering or responding to questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to overwhelm your child with questions • Ask short questions after providing some descriptive words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "I like that house. I like the red roof. Look the house has a blue door. I love the walls. What are you building?" • Give your child ten seconds 'thinking time' to process the question you have asked and give him/her time to answer
<p>May find questions such as 'why?' or 'how?' challenging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 'wonder' strategies, such as "I wonder what you are building?" • Use shorter sentences, simple vocabulary or provide choices, for example, "Milk or water?"

<p>May struggle to understand directional words such as 'under,' 'up' and 'on'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use play objects in the garden or in the house and ask your child to, "Go up the ladder," "Go under the slide," "Sit on the chair" • <u>Useful Resources and Links - Language and Communication SEND Plan</u> • Use gestures and demonstrations to help your child understand what you are asking him/her to do. You may need to repeat many times for it to be understood and remembered
<p>May have difficulty understanding spoken language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use gesture or movements to reinforce key words - 'look,' 'book' • Where possible, give demonstrations. Talk through what you are doing as you do it • Rehearse words many times • When playing together repeatedly use the name of the objects. For example, "Do you have a car?", "This is a car". The repetition will help him/her to associate the word 'car' with the item • Use simple daily tasks and games to develop your child's language: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Useful Resources and Links - Language and Communication SEND Plan</u>
<p>May have difficulty forming the sounds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a mirror to show him/her how that sound is formed using your mouth • Go on a 'sound hunt' to try and find items in the house/park, that start with the focus sound • Use magnetic letters to build words to understand the link between the sounds and the letters that represent them:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Useful Resources and Links - Language and Communication SEND Plan
May point at items rather than say the word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model a complete sentence, using the correct word for example, “The cup?”, “Do you want the cup?”
May have difficulty joining in imaginative play with others as he/she lacks the language to interact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ‘small world’ toys (such as toy cars, a doll, a play till) or ‘real world’ items he/she can play with (a mixing bowl, wooden spoon etc.). This helps your child to copy what he/she has seen you doing. Model how to play and the language • Topic Grids P1-P4 Blocks SEND Plan • Topic Grids P1-P4 Play-Doh SEND Plan
May have difficulty remembering words he/she has learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use lots of different ways to revise new words e.g. - songs and raps • Display words that have been learned e.g., on the fridge or bedroom door
May replace words for others e.g. saying “I want my t-shirt” instead of “I want my jumper”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name items repeatedly so that your child has the chance to become familiar with the word • Repeat the sentence correctly to hear the correct word
May use sentences more typical of a young child, such as “Me go home”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the sentence and model the correct words, “I am going home” • Say the sentence. Set out a Lego block for each word and ask him/her to tap each block as he/she repeats the sentence
May speak using simple sentence that lack detail such as describing words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on what your child says and extend it, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Child says: “I see a car” ○ You say: “Yes it’s a red car”

May take time to express what he/she wants to say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you ask a question, give 10 seconds 'thinking time' to respond
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Section 4.2: Primary Stage (Age 7-11) Speech, Language & Communication

Impact	Practical Strategies
May take time to express what he/she wants to say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you ask a question, give your child 10 seconds 'thinking time' to respond
May have difficulty participating in discussions and giving opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play simple oral games and activities at home Compare items, asking "How are these similar?" and "How are they different?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Making Links to New Words SEND Plan</u> Talk about your favourite things and why you like them. "My favourite dinner is... and I like it because..." Encourage your child to join in and to explain Turn off the volume on the TV. Encourage your child to guess what the characters or people are saying. Make up the story in the news or television programme you have shown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Reasoning Activities for P5 – P7 SEND Plan</u>
May have difficulty engaging in social conversation with his/her classmates and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act out an emotion e.g. happy, sad, excited. Your child then guesses what the emotion is Model correct body language when talking To help your child talk to someone new, help him/her with what he/she could say. For example, "Good morning, how are you today?" Response "Thank you. I am well." Practise taking turns when talking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide prompts to encourage conversation
May have difficulty getting your child's attention when you want to speak to him/her	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn off background noises such as TV/Smart Speaker as it may be a distraction • Say your child's name, move to his/her level and make eye contact when talking • Teach simple listening rules such as look at the speaker when he/she is talking, "Put on your listening ears."
May have difficulty paying attention long enough to hear what you are saying and may have difficulty finding the words he/she wants to say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow down. Speak slowly, emphasising the key words • Use simple language. Reduce the number of words • Chunk information into shorter sentences. Leave a pause between them • Play attention and listening games: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Attention and Listening Activities for P5–P7 SEND Plan</u>
May have difficulty remembering and following instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chunk information by breaking it into smaller parts, emphasising the key words. Pause between sentences. "Go and get your school bag (pause) and your lunch box." • Play games together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Auditory Memory Activities SEND Plan</u>
May have difficulty understanding spoken language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use gesture or movements to reinforce key words, for example, 'look' • Where possible, demonstrate and talk through what you are doing • Use simple daily tasks and games to develop your child's language:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Useful Resources and Links - Language and Communication SEND Plan
May respond inappropriately to instructions or questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your child to repeat back the instruction or question, “Go and get your coat. (pause) What are you going to get?” • Ask a question. E.g. “Where is your coat?” Pause for ten seconds to give thinking time. If your child does not respond, ask again using the same words, “Where is your coat?”
May find it difficult to respond to questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not ask too many questions. Comment on what he/she is doing before asking a short question e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “I like that house. I like the red roof. Look the house has a blue door. I love the walls. What are you building?” ○ Give ten seconds ‘thinking time’ to answer the question
May find questions such as ‘why?’ or ‘how?’ challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions, such as “I wonder what you are building?” • Teach the meaning of question words – who, what, where, when, why, how. Provide examples of how these words are used. Play games: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why Activities for P5-P7 SEND Plan • Ask questions after reading a story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Auditory Memory Stories for P5 – P7 SEND Plan
May have difficulty remembering what he/she	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child know it is ok to ask questions • Remind them that everyone needs help sometimes

has been asked to do for homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise them when they speak up
May have difficulty forming the sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your child is struggling with a particular letter sound, use a mirror to show how that sound is formed using your mouth. For example, when saying the letter 'p', both lips close completely • Use magnetic letters to build words to understand the link between the sounds and the letters that represent them
May mispronounce words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly model how to pronounce words correctly
May find it difficult to learn new words and use them correctly in sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the word to show its meaning. Act out the meaning, find a picture or use real life examples • Use songs and raps to reinforce word meanings • Read&Write software provides a vocabulary list which displays images of the word • Practise using the words in sentences
May substitute words for others, for example, saying "I want my t-shirt" when he/she means "I want my jumper"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name item repeatedly to become familiar with the word • Repeat sentences correctly to hear the correct word
May leave out word endings such as 'ing' or 'ed'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw attention to words ending in 'ing' or 'ed' in reading books. Show how these change the meaning, "I play football. Yesterday I played football."

Section 4.3: Post Primary Stage (Age 11-16) Speech, Language & Communication

Impact	Practical Strategies
May have difficulty learning new vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the meaning of words to check understanding • Create word maps for new vocabulary, to help him/her understand and remember the unfamiliar words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategies and Resources to help with Words SEND Plan
May have difficulty reading and understanding higher level vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology can be used to read any digital text aloud. Read&Write has software which can be used to look up the meaning of unknown words, and be read aloud: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read&Write Text to Speech ○ Read&Write Dictionary
May have difficulty understanding subject specific vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help identify the key words for that subject area. For example, in Geography, key words might be ‘eruption,’ ‘tectonic,’ ‘magma’ • Create a vocabulary list, with a simple definition and related image. This can help to recall the word and its meaning • R&W Flier for Home • Vocabulary List Read&Write
May have difficulty understanding concepts due to unfamiliar vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind maps are a way to explore how words are linked and provides pictures to aid understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategies and Resources to help with Words SEND Plan

<p>May have difficulty remembering information when revising for exams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn text into an audio file, which your child/young person could then listen to on headphones as an alternative way of accessing the information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Read&Write Audio Maker</u>
<p>May have difficulty using appropriate language in different settings (for example, may use conversational language when taking part in a debate)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and discuss different scenarios and how your child/young person might respond • Provide examples of what is appropriate to say in different settings
<p>May have difficulty using higher level vocabulary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend vocabulary by taking opportunities to teach other words through Paired and Shared Reading • Praise your child/young person when he/she uses these 'higher level' words
<p>May find it difficult to give presentations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model how to write out speech or note cards and how these can be used as a visual prompt to stay on task • Encourage your child to practise the presentation at home • Presentations could be recorded to help revise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Read&Write Audio Maker</u>