

**Children, Education and Skills Directorate**

Tips for Teaching Children with Learning Difficulties

Revised and updated April 2020

Please use alongside the SEND Mainstream Guidance (Supporting children and young people who have SEND at SEN support in mainstream school, September 2019) and consider these points:

* These tips should benefit ***all*** children. Children with complex difficulties may need additional and more specific advice/intervention from relevant support services.
* We have adopted a multisensory approach throughout this pack.
* The tips are applicable across the curriculum.
* The use of ICT to support learning.
* And finally, remember:

Results and progress can be slow - don’t give up.

Every child is different – find what works for them.

Be realistic and fair on yourself and the child.

Everyone has a bad day, once in a while.

**Listening & Attention**

1. Establish classroom rules of good listening:
   * Prepare group for listening activity using a class action rhyme
   * Keep hands still
   * Look at the speaker
   * Listen to what is said
   * Think about the same thing
   * Allow thinking time
2. Positioning of the child in the group is important. Consider:
   * Within the group, front or middle
   * Position in relation to an adult
   * Consider use of a carpet tile, wobble cushion or chair
3. Use visual clues:
   * Visual prompts to recall rules of good listening, good looking and good sitting
   * Visual cues throughout the session e.g. objects, pictures, photographs, gestures, flow charts etc.
   * Show as well as tell what to do
   * Visual timetables
   * Make frequent eye contact
   * Break down the task, *‘Blue Peter’* approach – ‘*here’s one I prepared earlier!’* as appropriate.
   * Menu of simple written instructions, if the child can read
   * Explore showing and telling but not at the same time (depending on the learning style of your group)

1. Gain attention using the child’s name.
2. Consider the use of multisensory approaches in activities e.g. doing, hearing, and seeing.
3. Actively involve the child in task, wherever possible. Consider giving the child something to hold to inhibit fidgeting.
4. Simplify your language
   * Short sentences
   * Emphasise key words
   * Give one instruction at a time
5. Check child has listened to the instructions:
   * Traffic lights approach – Green ‘Ready to go!’ Amber ‘I’m not sure!’ Red ‘Don’t understand yet!’
   * Child repeats instruction back
6. Quit while you’re ahead and finish on a positive.

**Understanding of Spoken Language**

*REMEMBER to gain and sustain visual attention.*

1. Simplify the length and complexity of your language.
2. Use simple vocabulary and stress key words.
3. Be specific. Don’t offer choices when giving a direction e.g. *It’s playtime now* rather than *Do you want to go out to play?*
4. Some children can only follow one instruction at a time. Others will need instructions given in the order you want them carried out e.g. *Do X and then Y,* rather than *Before you do Y do X.*
5. Try to use the same key language when explaining, again to avoid complication.
6. Use positive rather than negative statements e.g. *Put your coat on and then go out to play,* rather than *Don’t go out to play without your coat.*
7. Avoid ambiguity or implied meaning e.g. *pull your socks up!*
8. Use visual clues (pictures, gestures etc) to support the language used in particular with new vocabulary.
9. Identify a small list of unfamiliar topic words for individual teaching, both concrete and abstract
   * Concrete - e.g. centurion, fort, numerals, forum,
   * Abstract - e.g. most, many, few etc.
10. Check understanding by observation or gentle questioning and encourage the child to actively let you know if s/he has not understood.
11. Children need to know it is *OK* not to understand. They should be encouraged to:
    * Look for clues in the classroom
    * Ask a friend
    * Ask an adult for help

**Vocabulary & Concepts**

REMEMBER new vocabulary should be introduced gradually and constantly reinforced.

1. Before introducing a new topic to the class, identify a selective list (6 – 12) of topic words for individual teaching: e.g. centurion, fort, numerals, forum, and abstract curricular concepts e.g. most, many, few etc.
2. Ensure a mixture of words, remembering that nouns and verbs are easier than abstract concepts of shape, size, quantity, number etc.
3. Introduce core vocabulary consistently e.g. establish concept of *add* prior to using alternatives (plus, together etc).
4. Whenever possible reinforce ‘new’ vocabulary using real life situations e.g. lining up at door, reinforcing positional language.
5. Use real objects and then pictures to reinforce learning.
6. Link new vocabulary with existing knowledge e.g. habitat = where the child/pet lives.
7. Provide description of words to develop meaning in terms of the category, function, appearance and associations e.g. apple – fruit, eat it, round, red, green and pie.
8. Consider the sound structure of the words e.g. syllables, initial sound, rhyme etc.
9. Provide visual clues in class e.g. poster, diagrams.
10. Make a personal picture dictionary/glossary of words as a focus for discussion at home and school.
11. Provide increased opportunity for use of selected words in small group discussion. Display the words for adults to refer to.
12. Where possible, use mime, role play and drama to reinforce the words/concepts e.g. properties of materials – strong, flexible, float etc.

**Emergent Readers**

1. Use visual clues to reinforce written language in class.
   * Consider using specific multisensory programmes for teaching letter sounds (Read Write Inc) and common irregular words (*Action Words*).
   * Use of symbols to support text e.g. *Writing with Symbols.*
   * Any written language could be reinforced with 3D & 2D visual clues (including topic vocabulary) e.g. models, pictures, photographs, diagrams etc.
2. Don’t let children struggle – if they are stuck on a word, tell them it! A constant focus on decoding will hinder fluency and affect comprehension.
3. Use peers to help access the written language e.g. What does that say?
4. Consider using a paired reading approach.

Remember that some older children will continue to need the experience of reading aloud in addition to silent reading.

1. Ensure interest level matches reading ability.
2. Remember the child needs breadth of experience at an appropriate level i.e. parallel book.
3. Be aware of the need to develop comprehension skills in line with decoding skills:
   1. Ensure that you discuss the story line with the child e.g. retelling, description and prediction.
   2. Encourage child to identify words they don’t know the meaning of.
4. Involve parents at all stages to encourage success e.g. Parent

Awareness Classes, tips for parents (don’t let child struggle with

unfamiliar words be positive etc).

**Supported Groups**

1. Ensure texts and activities are relevant to the child’s level of learning.

90% of a text should be able to be read independently.

1. Consider the use of the following:

* personal books with lots of visual information (photographs, pictures, drawings etc) to reinforce personal / functional vocabulary e.g. home, family, school timetable and interests.
* class books to reinforce basic and topic related vocabulary.
* story sequencing, retelling verbally, adult scribing.

**Unsupported groups**

1. Activities will need to focus on reinforcement of previous learning through a variety of published materials or school resources e.g. matching, sorting, sequencing tasks etc.
2. The tasks must be familiar to the child.
3. Consider use of peer tutoring.
4. Use audio with books to follow while listening.
5. Use computer programmes to reinforce basic skills.

NB: Make use of any available adult through the school day to reinforce letter and word knowledge.

**Memory**

**Remember:**

1. Some children have a slow pace of learning and require constant repetition to consolidate new learning. Revisit!
2. Ofsted 2019 – quality of education judgement focuses on how effectively the curriculum enables **all** pupils to **know more and remember more.** Teachers need to ensure that content is planned that does not overload working memory.
3. People learn in different ways. Research indicates that 29% are visual learners, 34% are auditory learners, 37% are kinaesthetic (VAK).
4. Children need to be taught strategies for recalling information. The two most common strategies are verbal rehearsal (repeating aloud and then repeating internally) and visualisation (making pictures in your head).

**Games to reinforce memory**

1. Kim’s Game
2. Pairs
3. Listing games: My Grandma went to market…, I went on holiday and took…, Alphabet game e.g. I ate an **a**pple, a **b**anana, a **c**ake, **d**ates…
4. Action games e.g. Simon Says…
5. Listen and repeat e.g. telephone numbers, rhymes and instructions
6. Message games e.g. deliver a verbal message around school

7. Use of ICT e.g. Thinking Things, Mastering Memory

Using a **multisensory (VAK)** approach, the following ideas can be used to help children remember information:

1. Mnemonics e.g. because – **b**ig **e**lephants **c**an’t **a**lways **u**se **s**mall **e**scalators.
2. Use of colour as a visual prompt:

* To highlight key concepts
* To reinforce parts of speech e.g. verbs = yellow, nouns = orange, adverbs = green etc.
* To highlight mathematical symbols e.g. red for +.
* Black on a yellow background is helpful for some children with visual impairments. The use of coloured backgrounds may also benefit some children with specific learning difficulties.

1. Use of music rhyme and rhythm to reinforce learning e.g. changing

words of traditional songs to reinforce facts.

1. Consider use of any visual representation of the material to be

remembered e.g. diagrams, drawings, posters, mind maps etc.

1. *Share it, teach it, test it* i.e. opportunities should be provided to enable children to assume the ‘expert’ role and ‘test’ their peers.
2. Personalise learning e.g. picture cue chosen by child to help aid recall of abstract key words.

**Encouraging independent learning**

1. **Initially**, the emphasis is on developing the child’s independence rather than on the task in hand.
2. An organised, appropriately resourced and structured classroom promotes independent learning.
3. Be realistic with regard to the pace of work and level of concentration expected. Some children may require frequent changes of activity within one session.
4. Make sure that the task is well within the child’s level of ability. Some children may need more concrete tasks rather than paper and pencil activities.
5. The child may need to be taught strategies for independent learning, e.g. what to do, how to do it and what to do next. Consider using visual prompts e.g. photographs, drawings, symbols to show:
   * required materials
   * the steps within a task
   * the sequence of activities within session / day.
6. The child needs a definite understanding of the finished product and may need to be taught a specific way of indicating when they have finished the task.
7. Aim for quality rather than quantity.
8. External time prompts may be useful e.g. kitchen and sand timers. Gradually extend expectations.
9. Give verbal praise and establish a reward system for working independently.
10. Some children may benefit from a quiet, non-distracting work area, at certain points during the school day.