

Strategies and Activities for Children with Speech Processing Difficulties

To process speech, we need to be able to hear, identify, remember and sequence speech sounds in words. Children with difficulties in this area will usually have difficulties retaining spoken information and may mishear or mispronounce words. They are likely to have some difficulties with literacy, particularly spelling.

- Be aware of background noise in your classroom. Lots of children find it hard to filter out other noises in the environment which means that they won't be able to hear what you are saying clearly.
- In particular, when you are working on new vocabulary, or phonics, make sure that the room you are in is quiet so that there is minimal background noise interfering with the sounds the child is listening to.
- When you are talking to the class/group about a topic, make sure that the child has lots of opportunities to say the key words out loud themselves. Break the words down into syllables and talk about the sounds in the words, what it might rhyme with etc.
- Speak slowly and clearly, facing the child, and make sure the child is facing you.
- Ask the child to repeat back to you what they think they have to do after you have given them instructions etc.
- Allow time for the child to process what you have said, before expecting them to respond.
- Encourage the child to take time to think about what they want to say before they say it.

Activities – Note: these activities' main focus is on listening to the phonemes or speech sounds, not looking at the graphemes or letters, but where it is appropriate, you can use letters too.

- Play games where the child has to listen for a particular sound in a word. For instance, if the word begins with "f" they can post the picture or a token in a box; they can have a lotto board with a particular letter on it and they can collect pictures/tokens if they hear a word with their sound in it.

- You can develop the games above to include words with the given sound in a variety of positions within the words. E.g. “p” in the middle of the word – “apple”, the beginning “paint”, or the end “cup”.
- Read a list of words where 2 words start with the same sound and 1 doesn't. Can the children spot the odd one out? What sound did the matching 2 start with?
- With similar sounding words, get the child to identify which one you are saying, e.g. by putting a brick on a picture/word for one you say. (Words like fan/van, ship/shop, chip/ship, watch/wash/, pie/pipe, tea/key, fin/thin, bear/pear.) Can they tell you what the difference is?
- Read lots of rhyming poems and stories and nursery rhymes. See if the child can supply the rhyming words when they become familiar with them.
- Break long words down into syllables e.g. Cro – co – dile. Get the child to guess what the word is. Long words can be practised like this to make all the sounds and the structure of the word clearer. Choose a couple of words that the child finds difficult to say and practise doing these frequently and then saying the whole word. Practice makes perfect!
- Play games where you take a turn and move on a board/steps across the room according to the number of syllables in a word.
- Practise remembering sequences - you can start with simple rhythms for the child to copy and build up to more complicated ones. Learn simple rhymes off by heart, accurately. (E.g. “I’m the king of the castle. Get down you dirty rascal!” “Ip dip sky blue, who’s it, not you.” As well as nursery rhymes etc.
- Practise sequences like the days of the week. Songs can help this.
- Give the child practise following a sequence of instructions, like “Simon Says”. Talk about “first”, “next” and “last”. Mime them if the child has trouble remembering them when you just say them.

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