

## How to...Talk to Children

Talking to children effectively takes practise and experience. This guide contains some tips to start you off and remind you of some of the key techniques and strategies.

### **Get the child's attention**

Get down to their level, gain eye-contact or at least look at their face (be aware of cultural and other factors), use the child's name to gain their attention. Wait until you have attention before you give the instruction.

### **Be brief**

Put the most important information or instruction in the first sentence you say

### **Keep it simple**

Use language and vocabulary pitched at the right level for the child. This is difficult at first, as you get to know the child you get more of an idea of how to pitch it and as you get more general paediatric experience it becomes more natural.

### **Check understanding**

There are different ways of doing this e.g. 'tell me what it is you have to do', 'so what are going to do now?', 'tell me how you are going to do that.'

### **Be positive**

Even about errors e.g. for a spelling task: 'Well done, you've got all the letters there, now let's put them in the right order'; for a speech sound production task: 'You listened to me really well then, let's have another go at saying that sound'.

### **Direct not request**

If you use requests and indirect language, you run the risk of the child saying 'no' and it is difficult then to get him/her to change their mind

Do not say: 'Can you.....?' . Say 'You will.....'

Do not say 'If you.....'. Say 'When you.....'

### **Respect the child**

Think about your body language, the tone and volume of your voice, what you are laughing at (or who), being non-judgemental (of children and parents), not condescending/patronising and not stereotyping.

### **Be aware of the child's personality**

You need to match styles, you may need to adjust your normal style to suit the child e.g. If you have a very quiet child you may need to tone down an exuberant personality until you get to know each other, or if your child is very lively, you may have to liven up your own quiet nature.

### **Building rapport**

Smile, look at the child, use their name (find out the parents name and what they want you to call them), listen and respond to or acknowledge what the child has said even if it is irrelevant to what you want to do. Share information about yourself when appropriate to let the child know that you are a real person. If you make a mistake let the child know, this helps them to see that making mistakes is acceptable.

### **Introducing tasks**

When you introduce a task, describe the activity e.g. 'we're going to look at some pictures', don't label it e.g. don't say 'I'm going to assess you now'. The child needs to have a motivation to do the task. Think about what's in it for them? This could be playing a game, practising or building on a skill they have just learned, learning something new to help an area of difficulty, e.g. 'we've just been learning about x, now we're going to do y', 'we're going to look at some pictures now', 'I've got a game for us to play'.

### **Explaining tasks**

Be explicit about the main aim of task first e.g. 'I want you to name these pictures', 'I want you to think of rhymes', 'I want you tell me the strategy you use.' Then give more detail about the task, but, don't rely on verbal explanation, demonstrate the task. Sometimes you can start a task and explain it at the same time, the child will understand from watching and joining in. Don't talk too much, keep it simple. Try to use a multi-sensory approach when explaining (kinaesthetic, auditory, visual)

### **Feedback**

Be specific and descriptive. Give positive statements about what the child is doing to help them recognise what they have done that is right and help them remember it, e.g. 'you watched what I was doing and copied very carefully'. Do not over-use general praise e.g. good, well done. You can turn a negative into a positive e.g. 'you listened very well, now say that word again', 'your hand writing is very neat but can you make it a bit smaller?' When the child has done something very different to what you expected sometimes a question/request helps e.g. why did you do that/ tell me/show me what you've done.

### **Modifying your own behaviour**

Analyse why the child behaved /performed in a particular way. If you present the same task differently will it change how the child understands it? If the child doesn't perform, you need to take responsibility for it and think about what you can do to help the child to do the task. Plan into your step down a simpler way of explaining a task. When giving feedback in assessments make sure you are consistent and don't give the child cues as to whether they are right or wrong.

### **Facilitating child participation**

If it is fun and exciting for you it will be fun and exciting for the child. Think about vocabulary: special, fun, exciting, magic. Use intonation and body language (facial expression, posture) to convey excitement. You have to believe it's going to be fun. Therapy with children is an act and a performance (and therefore can also be quite exhausting). Make it relevant and meaningful. For older children it is important that they see how the task will meet their needs.

## **Never say to children**

'I know this is boring but.....'

'This is really hard/difficult.....'

'Do you want to.....?'

'That was silly.....'

'I know you don't want to do this.....'

'You are wrong...'