How to support:

Your child's understanding of "WH-" questions - "when"

What are "WH-" questions?

These are questions that contain the following question words; "who", "what", "what is X doing" "where", "when", "why", "how", "what like". Some of these "wh" question words are more abstract and children develop their understanding of these later e.g. "why".

Below are some ideas for supporting understanding of; "when".

Strategies

- **Colourful Semantics** is a system for colour coding sentences according to the role of different words in the sentence. It can help children to better understand word order. It can also help children to understand 'wh-' questions.
- Use a multisensory approach i.e. different sensory elements throughout activities where possible – look, feel, listen, smell etc.
- **Visuals:** Use the "colourful semantic" visuals and Makaton signs to introduce 'wh-' questions and build the child's understanding of these. Talk about the colour of the visual, what the visual looks like, and what it represents. This helps the child to remember the question word and its meaning.
- **"When"**: Introduce the visual symbol and Makaton sign and talk about this - the brown colourful semantics visual/symbol with a clock and a question mark represents the "when" question word. When we talk about the "when" question word, we're thinking about time.
- **Support the child to look for clues:** When asking the child "when" something happened and you're looking in pictures/photos/videos, remind the child to look out for clues that might show us the time e.g. is it bright or dark? (time of day), is it hot or cold? (time of year) etc.
- **Offer a choice**: When asking "wh-" questions and the child demonstrates difficulty answering, you can offer a choice or forced alternative. Be sure to give them some processing time and repeat the question and if they are unable to answer you can help further e.g. if you're looking at a picture of a dog running in the park and you ask, "when is dog running?" and the child is having difficulty, you can ask "is it in the morning or the night time?".

Activities

Once you have introduced the "when" question word supported by the visual, support the child's understanding by engaging in different activities...

Objects with people/characters:
Use toy characters to act out scenarios at specific times in the day/specific times in the year e.g. doll, teddy, superheroes, animals at lunch time, bedtime, the morning, in the summer, in the winter etc. Ask the child "when" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign as you are acting out different scenarios e.g. "when did teddy put on his pyjamas?", "when did dolly eat cereal?", "when did dolly go to the beach?" etc.

Photographs:
Use photographs of the child/peers/family members doing different actions at different times in the day and/or in different times in the year. Ask the child "when" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "when did you eat the ice-cream at the beach?", "when was Molly eating toast?", "when was mummy wearing her hat and scarf?".

Pictures:
Use pictures from stories or pictures of people/characters doing different actions. Ask the child "when" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "when was Superman flying in the sky?"

Books:
Use books/stories the child enjoys. Look at the pictures in the story and talk about what is happening. Ask the child "when" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "when did Peppa Pig make a snowman?", "

Videos:
Use videos of the child/peers/family members doing different actions or use videos of their favourite characters from their favourite shows. Ask the child "when" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign related to the videos e.g. "when did you eat the ice-cream at the beach?", "when was Molly eating toast?", "when was mummy wearing her hat and scarf?".

Telling News:
Use news sharing as an opportunity to ask "when" questions. If the children are talking about what they did at the weekend, you could ask "when" questions e.g. "when did you go to the park?", "when did you go to the cinema?" etc. Support this with the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign.

Everyday activities:
We do lots of different actions throughout the day. Use natural opportunities across the

day to ask “when” questions as different actions are happening in different places. Ask “when” questions as these opportunities arise, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. “when do we have fish and chips for lunch?”.

Reference Sources

The use of activities with colour coding and question word prompts in this “how to guide” and other sections of this resource is based on the work of Alison Bryan, SLT (Colourful Semantics) and Becky Shanks, SLT (Narrative Therapy)...

- ‘Colourful semantics: thematic role therapy’ by Alison Bryan, in Language Disorders in Children and Adults, ed. Chiat, Law & Marshall, 1997, Whurr.
- ‘Speaking and Listening Through Narrative’, Black Sheep Press, based on the work of Becky Shanks and further developed in collaboration with Helen Rippon.