## How to support:

# Your child's understanding of "WH-" questions - "how", "why"

## 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; "how", "why".

## 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.
- **Support the child to look for clues:** When asking the child "how" something happened and you're looking in pictures/photos/videos, remind the child to look out for clues that might show us the answer e.g. if asking how someone travelled to somewhere, encourage the child to see if there are clues for their mode of transport – a car/bicycle/train 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 children in a park and you ask, "how did the girl get to the park?" and the child is having difficulty, you can ask "did she walk or cycle?".

## Activities

Once you have introduced the "how" and/or "why" question words 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 e.g. with a doll, teddy, superheroes, animals, toy house etc. Ask the child "how" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign as you are acting out different scenarios e.g. "how did the teddy get upstairs?", "why is the teddy in bed?"

**Photographs**
Use photographs of the child/peers/family members doing different actions." Ask the child "how" and "why" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "how did you get the ice-cream?", "why did you need your mummy's help?", "why are you wearing suncream?" etc.

**Pictures**
Use pictures from stories or pictures of people/characters doing different actions. Ask the child "how" and "why" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "why 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 "how" and "why" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. "how did Peppa Pig make a snowman?", "why was Peppa Pig wearing gloves?"

**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 "how" and "why" questions, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign related to the videos e.g. "why was Molly eating toast?", "why was mummy wearing her hat and scarf?".

**Telling News**
Use news sharing as an opportunity to ask "how" and "why" questions. If the children are talking about what they did at the weekend, you could ask "how" and "why" questions e.g. "why did you play inside and not outside?", "how did you buy tickets at 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 “how” and “why” questions as different actions are happening in different places. Ask “how” and “why” questions as these opportunities arise, supported by the Colourful Semantics symbol and Makaton sign e.g. “how did you make that tower?”, “why are we going outside?”.

## 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.