BELS Barnet Education & Learning Service

NHS Whittington Health NHS Trust

How to develop:

Understanding of "key word" instructions or "information carrying word" (ICW) instructions

What are "key words" or "information carrying words" (ICWs)?

This is one measure of early language development. These are words that the individual needs to be able to understand, to know what has been said (in instructions, conversation etc.).

The key words/ICWs in the following instruction have been underlined: "Put the teddy under the chair".

To be sure that a word is a key word/ICW, alternatives must be available for each option when the instruction is provided e.g. teddy or doll, under or in, and chair or table.

NB: Typically:

- Children aged 1 year can follow instructions containing 1 key word/ICW.
- Children aged 2 years can follow instructions containing 2 key words/ICWs.
- Children aged 3 can understand instructions containing 3 key words/ICWs and
- Children aged 4 can understand instruction containing 4 key words/ICWs.

Strategies

- Use Makaton signs or gestures to support.
- Use a multisensory approach i.e. different sensory elements throughout activities where possible – look, feel, listen, smell etc.
- Note – you may need to target certain vocabulary on its own before the child will be able to follow it in an instruction e.g. if you're giving 3 or 4 key word instructions with certain concepts (such as size, prepositions etc) and the child doesn't understand these words, they won't be able to follow the instruction and you will need to target these words first. See other "how to" guides to support different concept words.
- Generalise the skill to different opportunities/contexts across the day e.g. provide key word instructions during classroom activities, pitching them to the level you are working on. NB: Just remember, alternatives need to be available for a word to be a "key word" or "information carrying word" in the instruction.

Activity ideas

***NB**: Alternatives would be available for all the underlined words in the below examples.*

Toys: The adult places various toys on the table (remember there must be an alternative for each key word in the instruction e.g. teddy/doll or big/small, red/green/blue shaped duplo/lego pieces) and asks the child to follow instructions. Use toys/items that the child is motivated by. See examples of instructions below at the different levels of key words/ICWs.

1 key word/ICW	Find the teddy.
2 key words/ICWs	Put the doll in the house.
3 key words/ICWs	Put the doll and the teddy in the kitchen.
4 key words/ICWs	Put the cow in the bowl and the pig in the farm.

Action game: The adult gives the children instructions to carry out. Use toys/items/character that the child is motivated by. See examples of instructions below at the different levels of key words/ICWs.

1 key word/ICW	Daniel jump
2 key words/ICWs	Daniel jump and then clap.
3 key words/ICWs	Daniel roll the ball to Sarah.
4 key words/ICWs	Daniel hop and then throw the bean bag to Max.

Barrier games: Barrier games involve pupils having the same pictures or objects and a barrier (e.g. a book or folder stood upright) in between them and their peers. The barrier can be removed to reduce the level of difficulty. Adults give instructions about placing a picture or object somewhere (e.g. “put car on red."). Everyone’s objects should be in the same place at the end of each instruction. This can be played in pairs or as a whole group. Use items/toys/characters the child is motivated by. See examples of instructions below at the different levels of key words.

1 key word/ICW	Pick up the car.
2 key words/ICWs	Put the chair on blue.
3 key words/ICWs	Put the ball under the snake.
4 key words/ICWs	Put the soft teddy in front of the sofa.

Barrier game with drawing: This game is the same as the original barrier game. However, each person has the same-coloured pencils, e.g. red, yellow, and blue, and blank pieces of paper. The adult draws a basic picture and then gives instructions. The child's picture should be the same as the adult's if they have understood the instructions. Plan your instructions prior to doing this activity otherwise they will be too complicated. This activity is appropriate for older children. Create drawings of items the child is motivated by.

3 key words/ICWs	Draw a big circle in the middle of the paper.
4 key words/ICWs	Draw a blue line across the circle

Colouring in: The adult gives the children instructions to carry out. See examples of instructions below at the different levels of key words/ICWs. Please remember there must be alternatives for each key word/ICW e.g. sun/moon, big/small, chair/bed and big chair, small chair, big bed, and small bed. Use pictures of items/characters the child is motivated by.

1 key word/ICW	Colour the sun.
2 key words/ICWs	Colour the big chair.
3 key words/ICWs	Colour the small flower red.
4 key words/ICWs	Colour the chimney and 2 windows blue.

Routines: Give the child instructions to follow during familiar routines at home or during the school day e.g. when tidying up, putting away shopping, during cooking, during a play activity. As the child knows the routine, they can focus completely on the language you are using and the activity they are doing. At first, they may use the context as a clue, but work up to them following the instructions without any objects as clues.
E.g.

- During tidying: "Put mummy's coat in the bedroom", "put the cars on the shelf".
- Putting away the shopping: "Put the toothpaste in the bathroom".
- During messy play in school: "Pour some sand in the bucket", "Squeeze red paint on the plate".