FOSTERING DIFFERENCE

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

How language and communication difficulties affect your child's behaviour

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'Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively, with words of encouragement, or destructively, using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate, and to humble'

- Yehuda Berg

Acknowledgment:

This resource is part of a series of resources for foster parents who are raising children living with developmental difference caused by early life adversity. The guides are intended to provide general educational information only, and are not intended as a substitute for professional assessment and intervention.

Suggested Citation:

Communication problems and challenging behaviour

We all rely on our language skills to make sense of the world. Children that have difficulties with language or have delayed language development may experience the social world as confusing and frustrating. This is because we all rely on language to make sense of our world; and to communicate our needs. If we were unable to do this for whatever reason, we certainly wouldn't get the same enjoyment from life.

Just imagine for a minute that you were magically transported right now to a foreign country. In this country everyone speaks a strange language. How would you feel? How easy would it be to make yourself understood? Over time, you may be able to develop a basic understanding of the language and be able to get by with expressing your needs through signs and gestures. But it would be difficult to communicate feelings or make deep friendships because you wouldn't know the nuances and rules of the language. I imagine you would probably feel frustrated and alone. A child with language and communication difficulties will often feel like those around him are speaking a foreign language and he can't make himself understood. Is it any wonder the child with communication difficulties is so often frustrated? Can we really blame them when they lash out in frustration?

Children in foster care often have delayed or disordered language and communication. These difficulties often go undetected or untreated. This resource will explain why children in foster care can have difficulty with understanding and communicating language; and provide some strategies for addressing these issues so that you can minimise your child's frustration.

Why is language so important to children's wellbeing?

We think that language plays a very important role in children's social-emotional development. Children need to be able to use language effectively to be able to express their needs, to think logically, to interact socially with other children and to control their own behaviour (through self-talk).

Researchers believe that the relationship between language difficulties and behaviour problems in children is quite marked. Amongst children with known speech and language difficulties, about half have a behavioural or emotional problems (a rate that is about five times higher than that normally found amongst children). Between 45-94% of children that have a behaviour problem can be expected to have some sort of speech or language problem; whether or not this has been formally identified (Stringer et al., 2003; in Stevens (2005)).

How does early life adversity affect language development?

Language is not learned in a vacuum. Children learn to talk and use language through their early social interactions; and within the context of their early caregiving relationship. Given this, it makes sense that a child's early life experiences can affect their ability to talk and use language to meet their needs. Researchers believe that language develops in an interactive way, from the very first interactions between an infant and their caregiver. Even though the early interactions resemble rhythmic sounds rather than speech, these lay the foundations for later language development.

In fact, our ability to use language effectively to meet our daily needs really relies on the smooth functioning of lots of different skills (listening, understanding, speaking, and communicating at the right time). If any one of these parts of the communication process is not well developed, it can mean that children can struggle in their daily social exchanges, learning and behaviour.

Put very simply, to be socially skilled communicators children have to:

- Know about the right words to use, based on their meaning; must be able to pronounce them correctly, and say them in the correct order.
- Know about the importance of the social context in deciding what language to choose and be able to modify their language according to the context (for example, know that they should use different language for their friends than when talking to the school principal).
- Know about how to use language to meet their social needs (e.g., how to make requests, how to take turns in conversations).

We believe that children's language development is affected by many things that can include:

- The child's medical background and history of illnesses (for example things like epilepsy, Downs Syndrome and other medical conditions); the influence of the pregnancy and birth; the influence of chronic ear infections or other hearing problems. Many medical conditions early in life can affect later language development.
- The child's family background – for example the position of the child in the family; the gender of the child (language problems are more common in boys); whether or not there is any family history of speech or language problems, and the family's parenting style (whether or not discipline is associated with verbal explanation; whether coercive parenting is used).

- The child's social and cultural background; for example the mother's level of education; the extent of the caregivers' support network; whether or not English is the family's first language; and family's socio-economic status.

What do language and communication difficulties look like?

Children entering foster care may have been affected negatively by many of the issues outlined above. But how can you tell if your child has language and communication difficulties? By careful observation of your child across several different activities and settings you may be able to get a sense of whether or not language difficulties are affecting your child's life. There are several areas that rely heavily on a child's speech and language abilities. The following questions might help you in deciding whether or not your child might need additional language support:

ATTENTION AND LISTENING: How well does your child pay attention or listen?

PLAYING WITH OTHERS: How well your child play with other children? Does she/ he seem to understand social rules like turn taking? Can he/she share? Does he/she know how to join in a game?

UNDERSTANDING: Can your child follow normally paced conversation? Does he/she understand what is being said? Does your child understand what you are asking her to do?

SPOKEN LANGUAGE: Can your child produce age appropriate, verbal communications? Does your child produce sentences and stories in which the words are correctly used and placed in the correct order?

SOUNDS OF SPEECH: Are the sounds and words that your child speaks properly formed and pronounced? Are they clear and easy to understand?

SOCIAL USE OF LANGUAGE: Is your child able to use language in a practical sense for social purposes (e.g., can they use words to get adult's attention, request directions; to take turns in conversation; to contribute in conversation in a way that is relevant to the topic of conversation)?

If your child is showing difficulties in one or more of these areas, a formal assessment from a qualified speech and language therapist may be necessary. You may also like to refer to the resource in this series entitled 'Guide to developmental milestones' for an age-specific guide to language development.

Broadly speaking, there are two main ways that a child's language development can be affected. They may be experiencing delayed development in speech and language, meaning they are falling behind their peers in the development of their language skills (as when for example, a seven year old child is speaking more like a five year old). They could, however, have a more serious form of language difficulty called language disorder. Language delay and language disorder are explained here:

Speech and language delay:

Overall, children can have difficulties across all areas of language development. This is what speech and language therapists call a speech/language delay. A child who has a speech/language delay may otherwise be following normal developmental patterns but they will just not be at the stage of language development that is expected for their chronological age (their language skills will be delayed compared to other children their age). Language delays are often associated with children raised in environments lacking in reciprocal social interaction, such as when children are neglected by parents. Language delays are also common when a child's hearing has been affected for an extended period; for example due to repeated untreated ear infections. If uncovered early on, language delays can be addressed through the provision of intensive language enrichment catch up activities.

Speech and language disorders:

Children can also have more specific difficulty in one or two areas of language development, when compared to the other areas of their language development. This is what speech and language therapist call a speech/language disorder. This occurs when a child's speech and language skills are just not developing in the way they would be expected to develop for most other children. For example, the child might be experiencing difficulties such as stuttering, or problems in grasping language concepts such as colour (semantic categories). These types of difficulties tend to cause more pervasive problems for the child and frequently require intensive speech and language intervention from a trained professional.

One of the language disorders that is commonly associated with other developmental difficulties is *pragmatic language disorder*. Put simply, this kind of difficulty means that the child is not able to use and adapt their language skills to meet their social needs -they aren't able to use language as expected in practical and social situations. This particular difficulty appears to be common amongst children affected by prenatal alcohol exposure, as well as those affected by pervasive developmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The assessment and treatment of language difficulties is complex and a detailed discussion of language difficulties is beyond the scope of this resource. Broadly speaking, however, we can think of children as having three main types of language disorders; **Speech, Language and Communication**:

If a child has a *speech disorder*, it usually refers to difficulty in things like using a clear voice to speak, using a tone that makes speech interesting; speaking without hesitation or repetition; or making individual letter sounds clearly so that people can understand what is said. Speech disorders refer to difficulties in the accurate production and expression of speech and sounds.

If a child has a *language disorder*, it generally means that the child has difficulty with using words in the expected way; for example joining words together properly to form complete sentences, stories or conversations; or choosing the right words to convey meaning; or being able to make sense of what people are saying. Language disorders affect the way that words are put together to understand and communicate in social interaction.

If a child has a *communication disorder* it usually means that they have trouble with using language effectively for different purposes; for example using language skills to be able to take another's perspective; or being unable to understand and conform to the implicit rules of social communication (for example, in conversation, you should give eye contact, take turns and stay on the topic).

The tips and strategies in this resource will be helpful for children with most language difficulties, but are not a substitute for a formal assessment and therapy program.

The tips and strategies outlined in this resource may be enough to help build communication, understanding and relationship between you and your child. This resource can act as an introduction to some of the issues that might be affecting your child and the strategies that could help. After working through this resource and the related links you may feel that a speech and language assessment and therapy is needed. It is very important to identify and get support for any problem that you might suspect.

The simplest way to understand speech and language disorders is to consider whether or not your child might be experiencing difficulties in one of three main areas:

Receptive language: -If a child has difficulties in receptive language, they will have difficulty in understanding what is being said to them.

Expressive Language: - If a child has difficulty in expressive language, they will have trouble expressing themselves clearly and making themselves understood by others. or

Social communication: - If a child has difficulty with social communication, it will mean that they find it hard to use language effectively in social situations (this is sometimes called pragmatic language disorder).

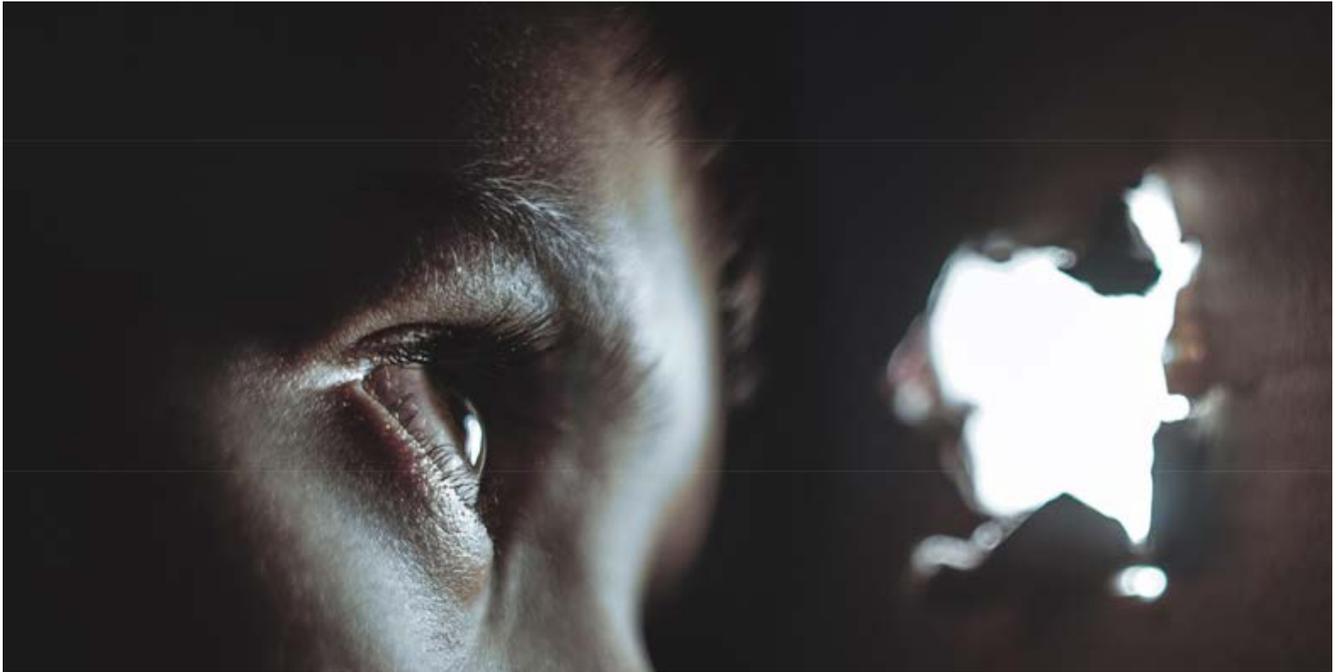*'Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care,*

because people will hear them and be influenced by them

for good or ill.

- Buddha

'We have two ears and one mouth

so that we can listen

twice as much as we speak'

- Epictetus

The three types of communication problems

Receptive language difficulties: the child has difficulty **UNDERSTANDING** what is being said

Expressive Language difficulties: the child has difficulty in **EXPRESSING** themselves clearly

Social (pragmatic) communication difficulties: the child has difficulty with **USING LANGUAGE** effectively in a social situation (sometimes called pragmatic language disorder)

So, how can you tell if language problems might be affecting your child?

If your child has trouble in **UNDERSTANDING** what has been said – you might see the following behaviour:

- They seem to ignore what you've asked them to do.

- They often do the wrong thing because they've misunderstood what you meant.

- You need to tell them the same thing several times or even show them before they'll understand.

- They might get angry or easily frustrated because they can't understand.

- They might have difficulty in doing something that is explained using complex words (e.g., "pay attention in class") but can do it easily if asked using simpler language (e.g., "Stop. Listen").

- They might have difficulty in responding because of the way a question is asked.

- For example ("Why is personal choice important?" rather than "What are the good things about being able to choose?").

- They may give answers that seem off topic from what you have asked.

- They may be over reliant on others to interpret what is going on- they copy what others do and say to mask their lack of understanding.

- They may need to have instructions repeated lots of times, or need you to give them simpler instructions; one step at a time.

- They may not respond to a question, or simply repeat back part of what you have said to them because they don't understand the question.

- They may mimic or repeat what has been said to them.

- They may find it hard to learn new words and meanings.

- They may have difficulty in coping with group conversations; may avoid or disrupt group conversations because conversations are too hard to follow.

If your child has trouble in **EXPRESSING** themselves – you might see the following behaviour:

- They use short sentences/sentences that are like those of younger children.

- They may use only a limited vocabulary and use these words repeatedly. They may use very few descriptive words.

- They may over rely on pointing or gestures to convey meaning.

- They may appear reserved or shy- they may want to join in activities but don't know how to ask; they may have lots to say but can't seem to put these ideas in order.

- They may find it hard to take part in class discussions, to give explanations or describe what they are doing.

- Other people might find it hard to follow what they are saying; their sentences can be short and lacking detail, or they give explanations that are difficult to follow.

- They can be very slow at expressing themselves; their talk can be filled with pauses or lots of "you knows?"

- You may notice that sometimes your child puts words in the wrong order or talks in jumbled sentences.

- They may be completely unable to name emotions (e.g., fear); and find it especially difficult to name more subtle emotions (e.g., apprehension, anticipation, surprise, terror). This can lead to immense frustration.
- They can become angry when not provided enough time to express their feelings or thoughts.

A child's ability to understand and use words to express themselves is very important. However, children also need to be able to *use language in a socially acceptable* way. For example, a child needs to know how to use their words to make friends, to join in games, or to take part in a conversation. These are all examples of using language for social communication (sometimes called pragmatic communication).

Whether we realise it or not, there are complex and often unspoken social rules involved with the use of language in different social settings and social situations. For example, we know implicitly which settings require us to use more formal language- for example in a professional setting or in a job interview. We also know implicitly that it is OK to use informal language around family and friends. These are types of unspoken language rules that we just acquired as we grew up, without much conscious thought. Children with social (pragmatic) communication problems, however, find it hard to understand and use language in the right way, or in the right situations. This makes it difficult for them to predict what is expected of them in social interactions. They may appear awkward; use inappropriately formal language or struggle to enter a conversation seamlessly. Children who struggle with social communication problems need us to teach them the rules of language and the skills to use language in the types of social situations that are central to the child's social life. Examples might include: what to say to start a conversation with a friend, how to ask if you can join a game, or how to take turns in conversation.

If your child has trouble with **SOCIAL COMMUNICATION** – you might see the following behaviour:

- Your child may have trouble using language in a range of ways that is typically expected of a same age child; for example to say hello, to ask for help, or to give directions.
- Your child may have difficulty in adapting their communication so that it suits the situation- for example; speaking more quietly when in a classroom compared to in the playground; speaking more politely to an adult than to another child; speaking more simply to a younger child than to a child the of same age.
- Your child may have trouble in reading social situations (inferring feelings from body language). They may struggle to understand what someone really wants them to do unless

they are asked directly (they cannot easily pick up on nonverbal body language, hints, or subtle cues).

- Your child may have lots of trouble with non-literal language. This means they will have trouble making sense of metaphors, double meanings and many forms of humour.

- Your child may interpret what you say in very concrete terms- (e.g., if you say "pull your socks up" – will not be understood as meaning "work harder", but rather quite literally as: "please pull your socks up a little higher").

- Your child will have difficulty in understanding and following the (often implicit) rules of social situations such as those involved in holding conversations, or telling stories. They may go off on tangents unrelated to the central story.

- Your child can have difficulty in using verbal and nonverbal signals to regulate social interactions.

- Some children can have a monotonous tone of voice, or unusual rhythm or pattern to their speech.

- You may notice your child has difficulty in applying what they have learned in one situation to another.

Tips for supporting the child with language difficulties

There are a range of strategies you can adopt that can make it easier for the child who has difficulty in understanding or using spoken language effectively.

As with other difficulties (See 'Guide to supporting the child with sensory regulation difficulties'), support will always involve 1) making the environment more manageable for your child; 2) changing your expectations of the child and 3) changing the way you interact with your child. Try the following:

Make the environment more manageable.

- Make sure the noise level is low; make sure unnecessary noise is blocked out when talking to your child. This is especially important in a classroom environment.

- Use visual prompts to reduce the child's need to rely on language. Use colour codes to support the child to learn categories; use visual prompts to teach the steps in a routine; use visual picture diaries and social stories to teach expectations.

- Use pictures and symbols to teach new vocabulary. Use picture 'mind maps' to teach how new words relate to words that the child already knows (for example, that feeling 'terrified', 'apprehensive', 'nervous' and 'agitated' are all words that are different ways of describing 'fear').

Change your expectations to match your child's language level.

- Teach children the words to use to let people know that they don't understand.

- Your child may need to be taught the names for feelings and may also need to be taught the right way to use feelings words-"e.g., 'I feel (angry) when you (don't let me play)".

- Provide visual prompts and reminders of household routines, rules and expectations.

Change the way you interact with your child

- Use simplified language, repetition, and shorter sentences.

- Allow sufficient time for your child to process what you are saying.

- Model the use of appropriate language and self-talk to suit the social situation (e.g., "I'd better use my inside voice now").

- Notice and praise the appropriate use of language. Reinforce appropriate attempts to communicate.

- Reflect back and expand on children's communication.

If you suspect your child has difficulty in UNDERSTANDING language, the following suggestions can help:

- Make sure you have your child's attention before giving instructions.

- Use your child's name before giving instruction or get them to give you eye contact (but only if they are comfortable with eye contact).

- Keep instructions as short and simple as possible.

- Use your voice to place emphasis on important parts of the instruction "First wash your hands; …(pause)… then sit at the table". Use pauses between the first and second part of an instruction.

- Demonstrate what you mean, or use pictures or gestures to reinforce what you are asking/ teaching if necessary.

- Speak more slowly; use simpler and more concrete words.

- Allow time for them to process what you are saying before expecting a response (it can be helpful to silently count to 10).

- Check with your child to make sure they have understood. Can they repeat what they think you want them to do?

- Make questions as simple as possible (see "Question Levels" box).

- Make sure you and your child agree on a safe way for them to say "I don't understand!" without resorting to behaviour (this might be a verbal statement that they have rehearsed, or a non-verbal signal they can use to indicate they are frustrated).

If you suspect your child has difficulty in EXPRESSING themselves, the following suggestions can help:

Try to slow down! Give your child time to think about what they want to say; to find the right words, and to put the words in a sentence that makes sense.

Repeat back what your child has just said incorrectly, but using the correct word, grammar or sentence structure (gently and without fuss). This gives them the opportunity to hear the correct expression in context.

Respond to your child's communication – expand on the words he/she has used by adding to it (e.g., add a description, add another naming word). This will help build and extend their expressive vocabulary.

Find opportunities to build language without putting undue pressure on your child. Talking aloud is one way of doing this. For example "I see you have three colourful balloons on your jumper" instead of "What have you got on your jumper? Are they balloons?" This can be expanded to "You have a red balloon on your jumper. You have a blue balloon on your jumper. You have a yellow balloon too!"

Avoid the temptation to immediately name an object that a child can't name. Instead use prompting questions such as: What does it start with? What do you do use it for? Or give two choices "Is it a mouse or a rabbit?" Monitor your child's frustration level carefully.

Avoid the temptation to immediately finish your child's sentences for them.

Be prepared to step in when their language fails them in social situations. For example, if you see your child wants to join in, tell him/ her what to say to join in the game.

Prepare your child for situations in which they will be required to come up with a story or a narrative about their activities. At school children are often required to talk to the class about events in their life (for example relaying what they did for special occasions, or when telling the class about their school holidays). Rehearse or revise events of the past so that they know how to convey this information in situations such as these.

Give plenty of opportunity for your child's strengths to shine. While language based tasks may be difficult for them, they may excel at activities that rely on visuospatial skills such as computer design, or sport. Identify and nurture your child's abilities.

If you suspect your child has difficulty in COMMUNICATION:

- Teach your child the words to use in common social situations. Teach your child the exact words to use in the situations such as - saying hello/ goodbye; starting a conversation with a friend (what topics might a friend find interesting?); asking for help; saying no when required; or how to address a teacher or a neighbour.

- Teach your child how to take turns in conversation. If your child is older you can both practice 'noticing' how this happens in movies or in others' conversation.

- Encourage your child to give eye contact as part of maintaining conversation to the degree that it is tolerable to them (poor eye contact is common in Autism and many children who have been traumatised may also feel uncomfortable with eye contact from unfamiliar adults).

Many of the websites designed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder may give you tips and ideas about building social communication skills. The degree to which your child's difficulty in social communication can be improved depends on a lot of different factors. It may be useful to discuss your child's needs with a qualified speech and language therapist.
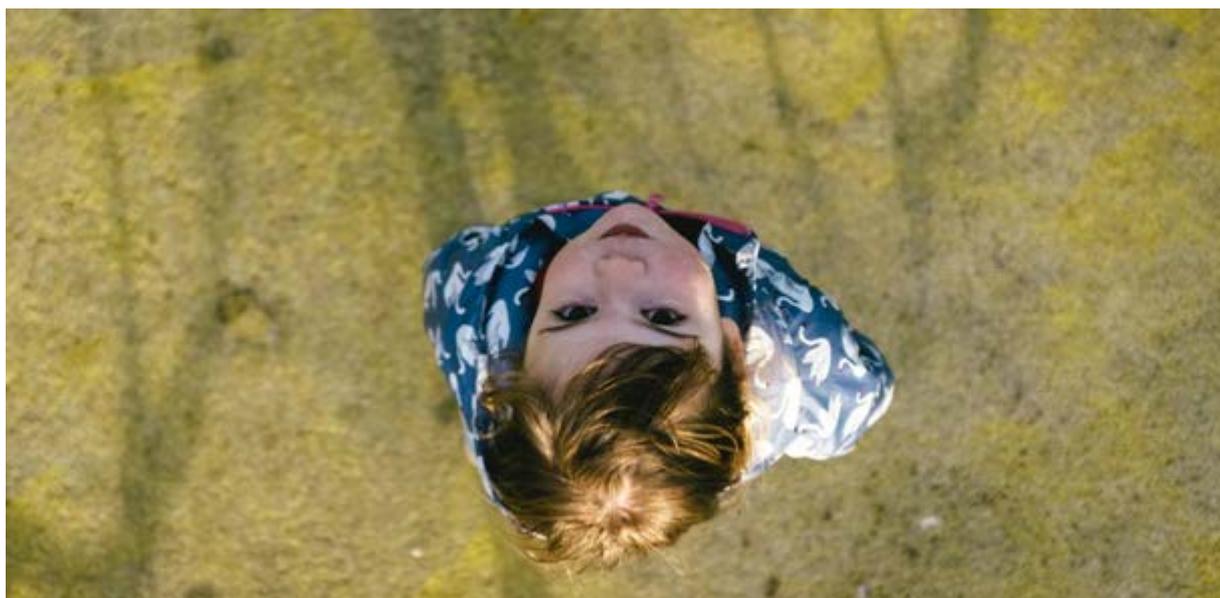
Some important information about language skills and problem solving:

Parents often ask about how we can help children who have delayed language skills to learn to problem solve and *reflect on their behaviour*. This is also a common expectation in a school setting, where a child is often asked to reflect on their behaviour and on the impact of their behaviour on others.

In reality, the capacity to reflect on one's actions and successfully problem solve involves quite complex cognitive and language skills. Problem solving typically involves quite complex thinking, including the ability to think about a problem from another person's viewpoint. Asking children to predict the consequences of their actions is also a very sophisticated language task, because it involves the child thinking about abstract ideas.

We now know that we can make it easier for children with language difficulties to reflect on their actions by the way we talk to them about their behaviour; and in particular by the type of questions we use to engage them in discussions about their behaviour.

Researchers in the late 1970's found that children's ability to respond to questions and engage in problem solving was directly related to their level of language development. These researchers found that there were four ways to question children; ranging from relatively simple questions to more complex questions. The researchers found that child's ability to answer more complex questions (such as those involved in self-reflection) depended on them having already learned how to answer much simpler questions. If children were not able to cope with simpler questions, they were unlikely to be able to respond to more complex questions. Although this might sound obvious, we often assume that children have the foundational language ability that enables them to understand complex questions. In fact, many children benefit when we are able to engage them in much less complex questioning. By making our questions simpler, we can help children to take part in problem solving more effectively.

Let's look at the different 'types' of questions- (or "levels of questioning" as they were originally called (Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978)). The questions in each level move from concrete (simple, level 1) to abstract (complex, level 4). If we understand how to reduce the complexity of the questions we ask children; thereby reducing the necessity for highly developed language skills; we can help to simplifying problem solving. By directing questions that are matched to the child's actual level of understanding we can help them to take part in problem solving and self-reflection more easily.

By making our questions simpler, we can help children to take part in problem solving more effectively.

What kind of questions you ask your child makes a difference!

Not all questions are equal! Children need more developed language abilities in order to understand and answer some types of questions. While some types of questions don't make much of a demand on language abilities, others do. Knowing how to use *less demanding questions* makes it easier for you to communicate with your child. It will also enable your child to develop skills in self-reflection, rather than 'shutting down' because of language barriers.

Marion Blank and her colleagues were the first to explore how well young children understood the questions that adults ask. She came up with these four levels of questioning; which range from simple (Type 1 questions; that require very little language ability to understand); through to complex (Type 4 questions; which rely on highly developed language abilities). Using the simplest level of questioning possible can help children to become active communicators about their behaviour (see box to follow).

How to simplify our questions to children.

It is worth reviewing how to ask children questions about their behaviour in a way that is simple enough to encourage self-reflection.

Let's take the following example of an incident that might happen at school. As an example, let's assume…

> *Little Jonny and your child are together at the art table at school. Both are drawing a picture of their house. Your child wants to use the red crayon, but little Jonny is using it. Your child asks for the crayon, but little Jonny says no. Your child pushes little Jonny over and takes the crayon to finish the picture. Little Jonny is hurt and goes crying to the teacher who sends your child out of class to 'think about what they have done'.*

You want to ask your child about this incident, find out what happened and talk to her about why she shouldn't push people and what she could have done differently.

You might be tempted to use questions like 'Why would you do that when all you had to do was wait for Jonny to finish?' or 'Why didn't you just wait?' However these kinds of **"WHY"** questions are actually quite complex and difficult questions for children to answer. Children with language problems may find it *impossible to understand* and answer these questions.

So how can you help your child reflect on their behaviour? There are several ways to make it easier for children; 1) by simplifying questions and 2) by talking about the problems in concrete terms, and 3) by relating the question to your child's personal experiences. For example:

Simplify the questioning

Simplify the conversation by using visual prompts and simple questions that need a lower level of language ability to answer (see box to follow). For example, instead of asking 'Why?' ask lower level questions, like 'What happened when you pushed Jonny?'

Use familiar vocabulary when asking questions. Instead of asking 'What do you think the teacher intended by sending you to time out?' ask 'What happens at time out?'

Use visual prompts: Draw a picture of the situation and discuss the picture using lower level questions such as:
Who is this? What is he doing? (Type 1 questions)
What is Jonny doing? What is happening here? Who is here? Is Jonny happy or sad? Where are you?
Are you happy or sad? What is different for you and Jonny?
What happens next? What does Jonny look like? Does his face look happy or sad? Does your face look happy or sad? (Type 2 questions)

Use concrete language

Make questions more concrete; and avoid abstract or reflective questions.
Instead of asking 'How do you think little Jonny would feel about being pushed over in front of his friends?' ask something like 'When that happened did Jonny's face look happy or did it look sad?'

Ask 'forced choice' questions. For example 'Does Jonny feel happy or sad?' (It is much easier for children to answer about feelings you have already named for them than to identify the names of feelings themselves).

Link the situation to your child's personal experience

Relate your questions to your child's personal experiences- this helps them develop empathy and understanding. Instead of asking 'Why do you think that little Jonny got so angry when you pushed him?' ask something like 'What does it feel like when you get pushed over?'

Ask questions about very recent events or objects that are present. Instead of asking 'Who are you going to play with at lunchtime tomorrow?' ask 'Who did you play with today?'

What other ways could you make it easier to talk with your child about their feelings and behaviour?

Type 1 questions

Ask the child to apply their language to things that they have directly experienced (things that they can directly see or have seen). These are sometimes called perception question; because they are questions about matching, or naming objects. These are the easiest types of questions for children to answer because they involve the simplest language skill.

- ✓ Examples of Type 1 questions include:
- ✓ "Find one that looks like this" (asking the child to match an object).
- ✓ "What is this called? (asking the child to recall the name of an object).
- ✓ "Say this" (asking the child to repeat/ imitate something simple that they have heard).
- ✓ All these questions ask the child to report on what the child directly experiences (sees, hears, touches).

Type 2 questions

In slightly more complex questions (Level 2 questions), the child needs to use their language skills to analyse and reflect on objects, by answering according to certain aspects of the object they are being questioned about (for example, they have to talk about the object's purpose, it's characteristics, similarities or differences). Here are some examples of level two questions:

- ✓ Find something that moves (asking the child to attend to/ select based an object's function).
- ✓ How are these two things different (asking the child to pay attention to difference)?
- ✓ Can you find me a fruit (asking the child to attend/select based on a category)?
- ✓ What is happening in this picture (asking a child to describe elements)?
- ✓ What things did the man say to do (asking a child to recall information from a statement)?

Type 3 questions

The majority of three year olds should be able to manage level 1 and 2 questions without difficulty. With increasingly complex questions, the child will need more developed language skills to understand and respond. Level 3 questions are those that ask the child to manage abstract ideas. These questions are not just about tangible things that the child can see, hear and touch. Instead, these questions ask the child to re-order information, to make predictions and generalisations, and to take the perspective of another person. Children with language difficulty will struggle with level 3 and level 4 questions. Indeed many children who have behavioural difficulties will find these kinds of questions difficult if not impossible to understand and respond

to. Yet these are the kinds of questions that we often ask children in response to social difficulties or when talking about a behavioural incident, for example:

- ✓ What will happen next (asking the child to predict what will happen next)?
- ✓ How are these two situations the same (asking the child to identify similarity of concept)?
- ✓ How would Jonny fix that (asking the child to take another person's role)?
- ✓ Tell me how to hang out the washing (asking a child to retell a familiar activity)

Type 4 questions

The most complex questions that we ask children are level 4 questions. In these questions, we are asking children to engage in real problem solving and to reason about their experiences and offer predictions and logical explanations. These kinds of questions are understood by the majority of five year olds under normal circumstances, but are unlikely to be understood by same age children with language problems. Here are some example questions of this type that will be difficult for children to understand and respond to:

- ✓ What will happen if you push little Jonny (asking the child to predict consequences)?
- ✓ Why can't you run in the corridors (asking the child to justify reasoning)?
- ✓ What made you push little Jonny (asking the child to identify a cause)?
- ✓ How can you tell little Jonny is sad (asking for explanations for events)?
- ✓ What could you do now (asking the child to create a solution)?
- ✓ How can we fix this situation (asking the child to problem solve)?

(Adapted from: Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978) The Language of Learning: The Preschool Years. Allyn and Bacon).

Useful websites and resources:

Older children with language difficulties are over-represented in the youth justice system. This website gives some tips and information about talking to young people whose behaviour is bringing them in contact with youth justice.

http://www.sentencetrouble.info/index.html

The Communication trust website is the result of over 50 not-for-profit organisations working together to bring language supports to professionals and parents who are involved with children and young people with language and communication problems.

https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/

The Speech pathology association of Australia offers information about the role of Speech and language therapists.

There is also a link that provides information about Speech and Language Therapists in your area.

http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/

Speech pathology Australia also offers information for members of the public about selecting suitably qualified Speech pathologist

http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/information-for-the-public/employing-or-contracting-a-private-practioner

To find out more about Developmental Difference and your child, visit;

www.fosteringdifference.com.au