

# Expressive Language (Using Words and Language)

**What is expressive language (using words and language)?**



Expressive language is the use of words, sentences, gestures and writing to convey meaning and messages to others. Expressive language skills include being able to label objects in the environment, describe actions and events, put words together in sentences, use grammar correctly (e.g. “I had a drink” not “Me dranked”), retell a story, answer questions and write short story.

**Why is expressive language (using words and language) important?**

Expressive language is important because it enables children to be able to express their wants and needs, thoughts and ideas, argue a point of view, develop their use of language in writing and engage in successful interactions with others.

## What are the building blocks necessary to develop expressive language (using words and language)?

- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of language.
- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Pre-language skills:** The ways in which we communicate without using words and include things such as gestures, facial expressions, imitation, joint attention and eye contact.
- **Play skills:** Voluntary engagement in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment where the activities may be, but are not necessarily, goal oriented.
- **Pragmatics:** The way language is used within social situations.
- **Motivation** and desire to communicate with others.
- **Fine motor skills** in order to be able to develop alternative forms of expressive language, such as signing, if verbal language is not developing.

## How can you tell if my child has problems with expressive language (using words and language)?

If a child has difficulties with expressive language they might:

- Have difficulty naming items and objects.
- Not link together words or uses sentences that are shorter than others of the same age.
- Use sentences that sound immature for their age.
- Use 'jargon' (made up words) in speech.
- Produce sentences that are 'muddled' (i.e. words in wrong order, lots of stops and starts, a lack of flow).
- Not be understood by unfamiliar people.
- Have difficulty finding the right words to use in conversation or when describing or explaining something.
- Have trouble retelling a story.
- Have difficulty writing paragraphs and stories.

\*These difficulties will vary from child to child dependent on their age.

## **What other problems can occur when a child has difficulties with expressive language (using words and language)?**

When a child has expressive language difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Behaviour:** The child's actions, usually in relation to their environment (e.g. frustration due not being understood by others).
- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of language.
- **Participation:** Participating in group or class discussions.
- **Completing academic tasks**
- **Social skills:** Determined by the ability to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others, and be able to recognize and follow social norms.
- **Writing stories** in a logical sequence with appropriate detail and grammar.
- **Literacy:** Reading and writing
- **Fluency:** The smoothness or flow with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are produced when talking.
- **Hearing**
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Sensory processing:** Accurate registration, interpretation and response to sensory stimulation in the environment and one's own body.

## **What can be done to improve expressive language (using words and language)?**

- **Play:** For the young child engage in play with the child on a regular basis, model how to play with toys, follow the child's lead and talk about what they are doing with the toys..

- **Talk to the child** often throughout the day about what you are doing, where you are going, what you are going to do, what you have just done.
- **Turn off background noise** in the home (e.g. television, radio, music).
- **Face-to-face:** Get face to face with the child when talking so that the child can watch your mouth to imitate how to produce words.
- **Expand the language** the child is using by repeating what they are saying and adding one or two more words to their utterance (e.g. child: “Dog”; adult: “A big dog”).
- **Books:** Look at books together that the child is interested in and talk about the pictures and/or the story.
- **Model** back to the child utterances that they have said incorrectly in the correct way (e.g. child: “Me want that one”; adult: “I want red apple please”).

## What activities can help improve expressive language?

- **Name items together** when looking at a book, in the car, looking outside, in play, while they are playing, whilst shopping.
- **Choice-making:** Offer the child choices so that they are encouraged to use words to make a request rather than relying on gesture.
- **Day-to-day activities:** Engage in lots of “day-to-day” activities (e.g. going shopping, to the park, to the zoo, to the museum) then talk about/draw/act out what you did and saw.
- **Play** something together that the child really enjoys and throughout the game model new words and phrases.
- **Look at books** together and talk about what you see.
- **Ask questions** about what is happening in a story and why it is occurring.
- **Sing songs** together.
- **Use pictures/drawings/photos** to make a book or sequence of events and make up a story about the pictures.
- **Read stories** to help model correct use of language.
- **Write letters** to friends.
- **Pictures:** Talk together about a picture and then write down what you said.

\*Activities above would vary depending on the age and language level of the child.

## **Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with expressive language in my child?**

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with expressive language difficulties is important to:

- Improve the child's ability to express their wants and needs.
- Improve the child's ability to express their thoughts and ideas.
- Develop an ability to tell stories and relate events to others and participate in group discussions..
- Improve the child's ability to respond appropriately to questions.
- Expand the length of the child's utterance.
- Develop the child's vocabulary.
- Improve play skills to aid in expressive language development.
- Improve pre-language skills to aid in the development of expressive language.
- Help reduce frustration in a child who can't get their message understood.
- Develop alternative forms of communicating (e.g. sign, picture exchange communication system, voice output devices) if verbal language is not developing.

## **If left untreated what can difficulties with expressive language lead to?**

When children have difficulties with expressive language, they might also have difficulties with:

- Forming friendships and engaging in social interactions.
- Completing higher level education.
- Applying for jobs in both an interview and written application.
- Developing reading and writing skills.

- Completing academic tasks.

## **What type of therapy is recommended for expressive language difficulties?**

If your child has difficulties with using words and language, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just using words and language) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child  
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

