Language and Literacy for 2-4 year olds

How can you help your child understand spoken language?

1. **Gain your child's attention before speaking to them** – Call them by their name, wait for eye contact or a sign that they are giving you their attention before you begin your message.
2. *Be aware of the complexity of the language you use with your child* – Shorten the length of sentences you use and/or simplify the vocabulary *e.g. Instead of 'Louis, stop and look at me!' Try to break your message down. 'Louis…stop!'*
3. **Pause between sentences** – This allows your child time to process the information.
4. *Order your sentences* – The logical order of sentences is important when you are asking a child to process multiple requests, give a set of directions in the correct order *e.g. 'Put your cars away and then go outside' rather than 'Before you go outside, put your cars away.'*
5. **Encourage your child to tell you when they don't understand**.
6. **Use a multi-sensory approach** – Actions, images, objects and real life experiences reinforce information the child has to listen to.
7. **Avoid using sarcasm and metaphors** – These styles can be difficult for most children under 6 to understand.

Activities to encourage listening and understanding spoken language

1. I went shopping

Start the game by saying, *'I went shopping and I bought a football.'* The next player must repeat this phrase and add a new item, e.g. *'I went shopping and I bought a football and some crisps.'*

If this is too hard, support the activity by using pictures. Cut roughly around the shape. Each player chooses and names a picture before putting it face down. The shapes should help but if a child still cannot remember they can turn the picture over and see the answer. This ensures success. As soon as possible remove this prompt. You may need an in-between stage. To provide this, cover the pictures with a large sheet of card after each player has added their picture, and only remove the cover if the next player gets stuck.

This game can be varied to suit any topic. It helps to reinforce vocabulary as well as memory. For example:

> *'I went into space and I took …'*
> *'I went into the garden and I took …'*
> *'I went to the park and I saw …'*

2. Simon says

One child is selected to follow the teacher's instructions.

These can be simple, e.g. *'Simon says touch your nose, toes and hair'*, or difficult, e.g. *'Simon says before you turn around twice, clap your hands.'* The level needs to suit individual or group needs. If the child makes an error in the actions they do, the supporting adult should repeat the direction and model the correct response. The child should then be encouraged to give a direction to another child or the adult.

3. Shopping

Put packages and food items on a table. Each child has a turn to go to the shop and buy items requested by an adult or another child.

This activity can be incorporated into role play and can become quite elaborate, but remember that if the play becomes too involved, the children will become distracted and the aim of the task will be lost.

Consider using shopping lists. Make strips of card with pictures or words (the number and level depending on the group). One player chooses a list and 'reads' it to the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper has to remember and find the shopping. The child can then look at the list so they gain easy visual feedback about the accuracy of their memory.

This game can also be varied as in Activity 1. For example:

> *The doctor could ask the nurse to fetch …*
> *The zoo keeper could be asked to feed …*

4. Dressing-up

Prepare a pile of dressing-up clothes. Each player is asked to find articles of clothing.

Encourage the child to find all the clothes first before putting them on, otherwise they will forget half of them! Lists of clothes could be made so the children can judge their own success. Again, this could tie in with topic work.

5. Run and touch

This is a useful game to play outside. Walk around the area and ensure that the children know the names of the objects/places. Give each child a turn to run and touch things. For example, *'Run and touch the tree and the slide.'*