

UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS



A PRACTICAL
APPROACH TO HELP
CHILDREN IN THE
CLASSROOM

Children's ability to understand questions develops in a typical pattern. We can make conversation and learning tasks easier for children with language difficulties by simplifying the questions we ask them. We can also extend children's thinking and language skills by asking some more abstract questions.

The Blank Language for Learning Model (Blank, Rose and Berlin, 1978) breaks questions down into 4 levels. It is a very useful framework to help us tailor our questions to each individual child's level. Children with language and learning difficulties will move through these levels more slowly, so the model will apply to them beyond age 6.

Level One (2-3 year olds)
Questions relate to the "here and now"
Examples "What is that?" "What can you see?" "Find one like this." "What is — doing?" "Is it a —?" (yes/no response)

Level Two (3-4 year olds)

Involve some analysis such as classifying/grouping objects, describing and understanding object functions.

Examples

"Find something that can ...(cut)."

"What is happening in this picture?"

"Where is the...?" (requires a location response e.g. "under the table" not just pointing)

"Find something that is ...(red) and ...(spiky)."

"How are these different?"

"Which one is ... (a fruit)?"

Level Three (4-5 year olds)

Require child to use their own knowledge to make basic predictions, assume the role of another, or make generalizations. Begin to use higher-order thinking skills.

Examples

"What will happen next?"

"How do you think he feels?" "What would he say?"

"How do I make... (a sandwich)?"

"How are these the same?"

"What is a ...?" (definitions)

Level Four (5 years +)

Involve problem solving, solutions and explanations. Require own knowledge and thinking about the future and past.

Examples

Predicting changes: "What will happen if...?"

Solutions: "What should we do now?"

Causes: "How did that happen?"

Justifying: "Why can't we ...eat ice-cream with a knife and fork?"

Explanations: "How can we tell he is sad?"

Activities for helping children understand questions

Books: Stories provide an ideal opportunity to develop children's thinking skills. For children at level 3, you can encourage them to predict "What's going to happen next?" in the story or ask about the characters: "How would the boy feel?" "What will the boy say to his mummy?"

For those working at level 4 you can ask questions such as: "What should the boy do now?" "Why can't he go home on the bus?" "How can you tell it is night time in this picture?"



Sequencing : Use sets of sequencing pictures to help children develop at level 3 and 4. This helps them to understand why ideas fit together so they will be able to make predictions and solve problems.

Role Play: Acting out scenarios in role play or with toys allows you to set up problems. The children can explore and develop their reasoning skills e.g. when role playing dinner time in the house corner you could pretend that you don't have enough plates and can ask the child "What could you do?"