Parent Language – Simplifying Language

Information for patients, relatives and carers

December 2023

What is simplifying language?

Speaking and interacting with your child is very important for developing their language and communication skills. However, some of the language we use as adults might be too complicated for young children to understand.

Why is simplifying language a good strategy?

When talking to children we may use language that they cannot understand. This can make it hard for your child to learn language. Simplifying your language can make a huge difference to how easily your child is able to understand you and use new words themselves.

How do I simplify my language?

It is important to notice how many words you use when you talk to your child. We often use more than we realise. Could you say it with fewer words? Try reducing what you say down to using only key words or short phrases. This will make it easier for your child to understand what you are saying, e.g. instead of saying "you can either have the red cup or the green cup today" you can ask "which cup, red or green?"

Your child may respond to visual cues such as pointing or using objects to help your child's understanding.

Activities to try at home:

☐ 1. Simplify language associated with routine .e.g. "Tommy, breakfast!"

☐ 2. Simplify language associated with following instructions e.g. "Get coat!"

☐ 3. Simplify language associated with asking questions. e.g. "Apple or banana?"

Simplify language used in daily routines

- Daily routines can be busy times and parents can use a lot of language to tell their child(ren) what to do. Try to listen to yourself and ask yourself are you using too many words and if so how can you use fewer words?
- For example, simplify "when you have finished getting dressed come downstairs and sit at the table for breakfast" to "first get dressed, then breakfast"
- Simplify "Tommy there's no time for you to play with your toys because I have to get you to nursery and then to go work" to "no play, Tommy nursery, Mummy work"

Simplify language used to give instructions

- Giving your child instructions can often result in you using more words than you need to How many words do you use with your child?
- For example, simplify "I need you to go and find and put on your shoes and then put on your coat and stand by the door" to "first shoes, then coat"
- Simplify "It's time for you to tidy up your toys because it's bed time and I want the room nice and tidy" to "tidy toys, bed time"

Simplify language used to ask questions

- There are two types of questions, open questions and closed questions. **Open questions** start with wh- question words (*who*, *what*, *when*, *where* etc.) and **closed questions** usually start with *do* or *did*
- Closed questions are easier for children to understand and answer
- Try to reduce the number of open questions you ask and increase the number of closed questions you ask
- For example simplify the open question "what do you want to eat?" to the closed question "do you want apple or banana?"

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have.

If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on
0191 445 6129 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday).

You can also email PALS at ghnt.pals.service@nhs.net

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:
Mrs Trudie Davies,
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust,
Trust Headquarters,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital,
Sheriff Hill,
Gateshead,
NE9 6SX

The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website (Privacy - QE Gateshead) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request

---