

Speech and Language Therapy Activities Understanding of Language

Speech and Language Therapy Programme Answering Questions: Blank level 4



At this level children begin to be able to justify why or how events may have occurred. Being able to say what might happen in a given situation is a level three skill but being able to justify it is a level four. Included in this is the ability to interpret information and to problem solve.

Examples of Blank level 4 questions/instructions:



- Justify a prediction e.g. "why will . . . happen?"
- Justify a decision
- Identify the cause of an event
- Solve a problem e.g. "what could you do?"
- Solve a problem from another person's perspective e.g. "what could she do?"
- Make an inference/interpretation from an observation e.g. "how can we tell that the girl is frustrated?"
- Explain why something cannot be done
- Select the means to a goal e.g. "how will she get some money?"
- Explain the logic of compound words e.g. "why is this called a handbag"

Activities to practice answering questions

These activities aim to help your child answer more complex questions.

Practice these activities for 5 or 10 minutes about 3 times a week! It is best to practice little and often!

1. Problem solving

- Start by using problems the child faces everyday. Use problems he can solve himself by showing you the answer. Next help him verbalise what he is doing or why. For example have a pencil sharpener in view and ask 'what do you need to sharpen your pencil?' Pause and if necessary



model the language needed to verbalise the answer e.g. 'what do you need to sharpen your pencil? You need a pencil sharpener to sharpen your pencil.'

- Manipulate situations so that the child has to give a verbal response e.g. don't have sharpeners available so he has to tell you rather than show you what is needed.
- Gradually move towards more abstract problems.
- As the problems become more abstract:
 - Provide forced choice alternatives with pictures or photos of the different options
 - Remove the pictures and just give a forced choice
 - Move towards helping the child answer this type of open-ended questions without needed this additional support
- Science and DT lessons provide valuable opportunities for problem solving

2. Problem solving from another person's point of view

- Start with real situations. Initially ask what the child would do and then encourage him to think what another child could do. The other child must be present. This needs to be based on real situations.
- Use role play and toys to act out scenarios as explained at Blank level 3 but now ask the child to suggest what the characters could do to solve a problem.
- Consider, as above, using pictures of options or giving forced choice alternatives

3. Justifying a decision

- This involves being able to justify why a decision was made. For example, 'Why did you join that with a stapler and glue?' if the child does not understand repeat the question and model the answer e.g. 'Why did you join that with a stapler? You joined it with a stapler to make it stronger'

4. Justifying a prediction

- Use the following ideas and ask **why** something might happen:
 - Encourage them to predict what is going to happen next during everyday situations, then ask why!
 - Make a visual timetable - encourage the child to look at the cue cards when they have finished an activity and tell you what is going to happen next, also ask how they know this is next!
 - Give forced choice alternatives - if the child finds it difficult to answer an open ended question then give them a choice of two answers with one of them being correct.

E.g. "why do you need to start a new page? Is it because this page is full, or because you've ran out of ink?"

- Ask them what is going to happen to others - Ask what the teacher might do next
- Use picture sequencing cards - Leave the last picture out of the sequence and see if the child can tell you what might happen next.
Gradually ask the child to predict things beyond the immediate situations
- Ask them to predict what they might do when they get home/at the weekend
- Ask them to predict what might happen to characters on the television or in books
- It is important to only ask for justification if the student is confident at making predictions (level 3)
- Praise any attempt to provide justification, however strange it might seem
- It may be necessary to give forced choice alternatives
- Work initially from real situation or pictures where it is very obvious visually why something might happen
- Move onto more abstract justifications only when the student can easily justify in simple, real situations or from pictures or photographs

5. Inference

This level involves developing the child's ability to make appropriate inferences, initially from picture stimuli and observations and moving towards abstracting information from text, situations and discussions

Consider the following when working on inference.

- Work from the child's observations of what they can see
 - Adult: how does the boy feel?
 - Child: he feels sad
 - Adult: how do we know he feels sad?
 - Child: because he's crying and has a sad face
- If necessary give forced choice alternatives
 - Adult: is it because he's laughing or crying
- Only move to more abstract inferences when he can cope with inferring from a picture, e.g. how do you know mum was happy when you left home this morning.



References

Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978). The language of learning: the preschool years. New York: Gurne and Stratton Inc.

Elks and McLachlan (2008). Language Builders: advice and activities to encourage children's communication skills. St Maybn; Elklan.