

# Early Years Communication and Language Development Service

## Asking Questions

## Asking your child questions:

If you received our first language pack you will know that in the first instance we try to discourage you from asking your child too many questions and to use comments instead. This is still a great strategy and we would encourage you to keep using it. However as your child's language continues to improve you will find that the questions you are able to ask can become more complex. The challenge now is to work out what type of questions to use! Remember to continue to use the 10 second rule as your child will need time to process the question and form a response.

Children's understanding of questions develops in stages and you may have heard your child's speech therapist or nursery teacher referring to Blank Levels. These refer to 'levels of questioning' and are a way of identifying different types of questions. They have been split up into levels which are in line with a child's expected language development. Remember - children need to be able to understand questions in order to answer them. Each stage has a related age that we would expect a child to master each level of question. As with all developmental areas you may find that your child is able to achieve these levels earlier than expected or they may require a little extra support to master them. This booklet is to help you work out what level your child is at, which will help you identify the types of questions you should be asking.

If you have any concerns or queries please feel free to contact the Early Years Communication and Language Development Service on the number above and we will be happy to offer advice and guidance.

# Blank Levels

Blank level questions were devised by Dr Marion Blank as a way to structure questions at different levels of understanding, ranging from 1 (simple one word answers) to level 4 which require reasoning. Below are examples of different questions:

**BLANK level 1: (Naming: 2-3 years)** Questions related to the immediate environment and require concrete thinking. Often many level one questions can be answered non verbally through pointing.

- Find one like this
- What can you see?
- What is it?
- What is....doing?
- Is it a....? (yes/no response)

**BLANK level 2: (Describing: 3-4 years)** Questions whose responses involve some analysis such as classifying/grouping objects, describing and understanding the function of objects.

- What is happening in this picture?
- Find something that can... (eg swim)
- Where is the...? (in this level a response is required eg. "on the slide" - pointing would not be classed as a level 2 response)
- Find something that is... (eg. blue) and ... (eg. spotty)
- Which one is a ... (eg. dinosaur)

**BLANK level 3: (Identify: 4-5 years)** A child needs to use their own knowledge to make basic predictions, assume another role or make generalizations.

- What will happen next?
- How does the girl feel?
- How do I make ... (eg. a cake)
- How are these the same?
- What is a ... (eg. bird)? You are looking for the child to provide a very basic definition

**BLANK level 4: (Predicting: 5+ years)** Being able to answer these questions involves problem solving, predictions, devising solutions and providing explanations.

- What will happen if...?
- Why?
- What could you do?
- How can we tell... (eg. that he is sad)?
- Why should we use... (eg. the axe) to... (eg. chop down the tree)?
- Why can't we... (eg. eat soup with a knife and fork)?

When using questions be mindful to pitch your questions at the level of understanding that you feel your child will understand. When a child is being told off you may have heard a nursery teacher or you may have said something along the lines of "you hit Freddie, how do you think he feels?" and your child may not give a response. Bear in mind that this may not be because the child is choosing not to respond, it may be that they don't understand the question and therefore CAN'T respond.

Always remember to talk to your child about what you are doing first - especially if you are introducing new vocabulary. Your child will not be able to answer if they don't have the appropriate vocabulary.

## How to make questions easier:

### 1) Make questions more concrete.

- Abstract: "Why did you throw all your books on the floor? What should you do now?"
- Concrete: "Where are the books? Where do the books go? Let's put them away."

### 2) Relate questions to personal experiences.

- Simplify a question such as "Why do you think firefighters wear such big heavy coats?" to "What does it feel like when you stand close to a fire?"

### 3) Ask questions about very recent events or objects that are present.

The concept of time is tricky for small children to understand so you may find they struggle to answer questions to do with the future or to do with things that happened in the past as their ability to remember and to predict has not yet developed.

- Instead of asking "what do you think you will do at nursery tomorrow?" ask "what did you play with today?" or "what are you playing with now?"

### 4) Use familiar vocabulary when asking questions.

Remember children need to understand language before they can use it. Therefore if you use unfamiliar vocabulary without explicitly explaining it to a child first they are not going to store it in their memory accurately and will not be able to use it expressively.

- Instead of "what is the function of a car?", try "what can you do with a car?"
- Offer a choice. "Is this a daisy or a sunflower?" instead of "what flower is this?"

# How to use questions at home:

These are just some questions you could ask. Feel free to change the activities to suit your child's interests. Also, try and think of your own questions too. Make sure they are at the appropriate level and remember not to ask too many. \*When asking a where question at level 1 & 2 your child might point at the object, take this as their answer and reinforce the language such as "you found the cutter" or "the cutters are on the table".

## CARS AND GARAGE

### Level 1

- What is that?
- Where is the fire engine?
- What did you hear?
- Find the police car

### Level 2

- Find the red car
- The car is going to the garage to get some petrol. What is the car doing? Where is the car going? (the answer needs to be modelled to the child first)
- What is happening?
- What else has wheels? (make sure another object with wheels is in sight)

### Level 3

- The car has arrived at the garage. What happens next?
- Find me something else we can drive that it not a car
- The car won't start. What does the driver say? How does the driver feel?
- What does 'frustrated' mean?

### Level 4

- Why will the cars crash?
- What could the silver car do to avoid a crash?
- Oh dear! The cars have crashed. What should we do?
- Why should we wear seat belts when we are in a car?

## STORY TIME

### Level 1

- What is this called? (pointing to picture)
- Where is the .....?
- What did you see?
- Find me the .....

### Level 2

- Who?
- What?
- Where
- What is happening?

### Level 3

- Tell me the story
- What might happen next?
- How does ..... feel?
- What happened at the beginning/end?

### Level 4

- Why?
- What could she do?
- What would you do if ..... ?
- How do you know ..... ?

## SAND PIT

### Level 1

- What is this called? (holding object)
- Find me a bucket
- Where is the spade?
- Find another one like this (showing child an object)

### Level 2

- What are you making?
- Find me something we use for digging?
- Find me the little bucket
- The crab is hiding under the sand and the star fish is in the bucket. Where is the crab?

### Level 3

- Find me the digger and then hide it under the sand
- Tell me how to make a sandcastle
- What might happen next? (as you lift the bucket up to reveal the sandcastle)
- I like your decorations. What does decoration mean?

### Level 4

- What made the sandcastle fall down?
- What can we do to stop the sandcastle falling down next time?
- The crab is stuck in the sand. What can he do?
- What other things might you find at the seaside? (objects out of sight)

## PLAYDOUGH

### Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me another one like this
- Where is the rolling pin?
- Where are the cutters?

### Level 2

- Which one can we use for rolling the play dough?
- What are you making?
- Find me the star shaped cutter
- Name me some more shapes (objects need to be in sight)

### Level 3

- Roll out the play dough and then find me the circle cutter
- Tell me how you made your .....
- What might happen to the play dough next? (when putting play dough through a press)
- What does smooth mean?

### Level 4

- Why can't we roll out the play dough with the cutter?
- What could you do if you did not have a rolling pin?
- What made the play dough go flat?
- Why is it called play dough?

## OUTDOOR PLAY

### Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me a bike
- What did you hear?
- What can you see?

### Level 2

- Where is the big ball?
- What other toys can we play with? (objects in sight)
- Find me 2 hoops/balls
- What is happening?

### Level 3

- Run and touch the fence and then bring the hoop to me. Ready, steady - go
- Find me something that you can play with that does not bounce
- What does safe mean?
- Tell me how to play the game

### Level 4

- Why will the bike break if I ride it?
- Why can't we play outside when it's raining?
- What makes the car move?
- What should we do to keep safe on a bike?

## SNACK TIME

### Level 1

- What is this?
- Which one is the banana?
- What are these called?
- What are you eating?

### Level 2

- What do we use to cut the apple? (knife in sight)
- Name some fruit we have for snack (items in sight)
- Milk comes from cows. Where does milk come from?

### Level 3

- Which food on your plate is not fruit?
- What does healthy mean?
- How do we eat a banana?
- What happens after snack?

### Level 4

- Why do we wash our hands before we eat snack?
- Why is the milk cold?
- What made the butter melt on the toast?
- Why can't we eat the banana without peeling?

## WATER PLAY

### Level 1

- What is this?
- Find another one like this (holding an object)
- What can you see in the water?
- Where is the boat?

### Level 2

- Show me something we can use to catch the fish.
- What other animals live in water? (objects in sight)
- Find me a red fish
- The fish is swimming under the boat. Where is the fish?

### Level 3

- Catch a fish and put it in the bucket
- Find me something that lives in the water that does not have feet
- What is a frog?
- Baby duck is lost. What does he say? How does he feel?

### Level 4

- Why can't a fish live out of water?
- Why did the bucket sink?
- Baby duck is lost. What should he do? What would you do?
- What else could you use to catch a fish? (objects not in sight)

## HOME CORNER

### Level 1

- What is this?
- Find me a cup
- Find another one like this
- Where is the teapot?

### Level 2

- What do we cut with?
- What other food can we have to eat? (objects in sight)
- Find me a big plate
- Teddy is eating cake and dolly is eating strawberries. Who is eating cake?

### Level 3

- Give teddy a drink and then give dolly some cake
- Tell me how to make a sandwich
- Teddy wants a cup of tea. What does he say?
- Teddy is eating dolly's cake. How does dolly feel?

### Level 4

- Why do we need to make a cake?
- Why can't we cook the cake in the washing machine?
- Teddy feels ill. Why do you think teddy feels ill?
- What could we do to make teddy feel better?