

Welcome Back Thoughts from the Language Literacy Lab – Fall 2014-2015

It's time to kick off our new school year! For those of you that are joining us at Barnstable Intermediate School (BIS) for the first time, I'm Barbara King, one of two Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs) at the school. Jeanne Baskin is also an SLP at BIS. Jeanne's time is shared between our school and the Barnstable United Elementary School. After enjoying a beautiful summer, I am looking forward to working with you and your students during the upcoming school year. Two years ago, I began the practice of sending a newsletter home each semester in an effort to provide communication with families on a more consistent basis. Each newsletter contains information on what students have been, or will be, working on during their sessions and includes home activity suggestions. The newsletters and a link to Jeanne Baskin's Social Skills Lab (SSLab) Glogster site are also available on the BIS website.

School speech-language services are based on each student's individual needs and goals as determined by the IEP team. In accordance with federal and state mandates, educational speech-language pathologists develop intervention activities that support state and district standards and grade-level expectations, and use curriculum-based intervention with materials adapted from the regular classroom curriculum as appropriate.

Students will be working on a variety of language skills this year in their Language Literacy Lab (LLLab) sessions. One important skill they will be developing is their ability to use strategies to understand and follow directions. Understanding and following orally presented directions and information is essential for success across the curriculum. In order to follow directions, students need to understand basic concepts and classroom concepts. Additional factors such as motivation, attention, auditory processing and working memory can also impact students' ability to follow directions. At the Intermediate School level, students need to be able to follow directions that contain multiple steps and they need to follow them in the correct sequence.



©Prawny * illustrationsOf.com/96115

(Image source: <http://www.illustrationsof.com>)

The goal of speech and language therapy is to assist students in developing skills and strategies that they can use independently to compensate for weaknesses in their communication skills. Parents and caregivers play an important role in students' speech and language development in the home setting where practicing skills in real-life situations reinforces skills that are needed to successfully participate in-and-out of academic settings.

Suggestions for Improving Students' Skills for Understanding and Following Directions

- 1) Gain your student's attention before beginning directions. Students who are occupied with watching TV, playing video games, or wearing earbuds while listening to music should be considered "unavailable" for understanding and following directions. Prompting him/her to look at you is the necessary first step before stating directions.

References

Rief, Sandra. (July 6, 2012). *Listen to Me: 6 Ways to Help Kids with ADHD Follow Directions*. Retrieved from <http://www.sandrariief.com/>

Advance Healthcare Network: For Speech and Hearing. (June 30, 1997). *Strategies for Children With CAPD at School and Home*. Retrieved from <http://speech-language-pathology-audiology.advanceweb.com/>

Welcome Back Thoughts from the Language Literacy Lab – Fall 2014-2015

Prompting may be done discreetly, such as with a gesture, or silently standing close to the student until he or she looks at you.

- 2) Reduce or remove competing auditory distractions when giving directions. Initially, this can be done by drawing attention to the benefit of a quiet background when directions are being given. Simply commenting, "I need to tell you something important and it's hard to hear in this room with the TV on. Can you step into the hallway or turn down the TV for a second" will alert your student to the need to engage in listening. The goal is for your student to learn to self-advocate and independently request quiet when important directions or information are given.
- 3) Begin with focusing on directions involving one step. Note that not all directions contain the same level of difficulty. Directions that include directionality (i.e. right/left), one or more adjectives, sequence words, and negative markers (i.e. "don't," "shouldn't," "never") are considered more difficult to follow. Directions with negative markers are likely more difficult for students to follow due to the possibility of the student missing the negative marker. When the student is successful, move to lengthier, or more complex directions. It is helpful to initially state the number of steps your directions will include. For example, "I want you to do two things. First, _____, and then _____."
- 4) Always face the student directly and state the directions clearly, pause briefly between phrases and emphasize key words. Make sure to maintain your volume throughout the direction, without fading away in the middle of the sentence. Keeping a constant volume will encourage your student to maintain attention throughout completion of the directions.
- 5) Have your student identify key, important, words in the directions. Helping train your student to identify key words will assist him/her in learning to use active listening skills.
- 6) Ask your child to repeat the directions back to you. Paraphrasing is acceptable since the student who can accurately paraphrase information has demonstrated understanding of it. Some students are able to repeat information verbatim, but do not have an accurate understanding of it.
- 7) Provide positive, descriptive praise when your student requests repetition or clarification of directions. Encouragement of self-advocacy is an important strategy for all students to develop. Some students become overly dependent on waiting for adult repetitions of directions 1:1, rather than using taught strategies to focus their attention when directions are being given. If you often notice this behavior at home, ask your student to tell you what part of the directions he remembers before repeating them.
- 8) To help children learn to take phone messages, try posting a checklist of cues to visually prompt your student. A checklist or graphic organizer cueing your student to write down the caller's name, message, phone number, note who the message is for, and ask for a good time to call back can prove to be very helpful.

References

Rief, Sandra. (July 6, 2012). *Listen to Me: 6 Ways to Help Kids with ADHD Follow Directions*. Retrieved from <http://www.sandrarium.com/>

Advance Healthcare Network: For Speech and Hearing. (June 30, 1997). *Strategies for Children With CAPD at School and Home*. Retrieved from <http://speech-language-pathology-audiology.advanceweb.com/>