



Understanding 1 key word

Before your child can understand long sentences, they need to be able to understand key words and short phrases. Some instructions we give young children do not require them to understand the language. For example, when an adult says 'Put your boots on' while standing by the door and holding out the child's boots; or 'Line up at the door' while pointing to all the other children already lined up. In these situations, the child can understand what is meant from context and visual cues.

'Information-carrying words' are the key words which convey a sentence's meaning without any other clues. This is different from the actual number of words spoken in a sentence. Some children need to practice understanding language using key words. Some ideas are suggested below.



Understanding 1 key word:

- **Getting dressed** – Give your child simple directions, 1 item of clothing at a time (e.g. 'Where's your hat', 'Put on your boots').
- **Body parts** – Use a teddy to practice body parts (e.g. 'Where's teddy's eyes', 'Where's teddy's feet'). Bath time is a great time to practice this, as well as singing songs like 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'. 
- **Action games** – Use a teddy and give simple directions using action words (e.g. 'Make teddy jump', 'Make teddy sleep'). Sing familiar songs that include action words such as 'If You're Happy and You Know It'.
- **Outdoors** – Choose 3 or 4 things you can see outside. Give directions for your child to follow (e.g. 'Run to the gate', 'Run to the tree').
- **Shopping** – Take turns to be the shopkeeper and customer, give your child directions to follow (e.g. 'Can I have an apple', 'I'd like a banana'). Alternatively, do this activity with real items when putting your shopping away.
- **Posting** – Make a post box out of a cereal box, lay out a few pictures or flashcards and give your child simple directions (e.g. 'Where's the apple', 'Post the bus'). Alternatively, use real objects/toys and have your child put each one in a bag. 
- **Feed me** – Use a puppet, teddy or toy figure. Use play food or picture cards and give directions such as 'Give teddy an apple', 'Give teddy a cake').

Remember, when working on key words, the focus is on understanding language without any other clues. Look at the child when giving instructions to stop yourself pointing or looking at the object you're requesting. Make sure there is a choice for each key word (e.g. 'Give me an apple' vs. *banana* or 'Make teddy jump' vs. *sit*).




Understanding 2 key words

Before your child can understand long sentences, they need to be able to understand key words and short phrases. Some instructions we give young children do not require them to understand the language. For example, when an adult says 'Put your boots on' while standing by the door and holding out the child's boots; or 'Line up at the door' while pointing to all the other children already lined up. In these situations, the child can understand what is meant from context and visual cues.



'Information-carrying words' are the key words which convey a sentence's meaning without any other clues. This is different from the actual number of words spoken in a sentence. Some children need to practice understanding language using key words. Some ideas are suggested below. Once your child can understand at 1 key word level, try moving on to 2 key words.

Understanding 2 key words:

- **Dress up** – Have fun playing dress up. Give your child silly instruction with 2 key words (e.g. 'Put a sock on your head', 'Put the scarf on your feet'). 
- **Outdoors** – Choose 3 or 4 things you can see outside. Give directions for your child to follow (e.g. 'Run to the gate', 'Hop to the tree').
- **Shopping** – Take turns to be the shopkeeper and customer, give your child directions with 2 key words (e.g. 'Can I have a banana and an apple').
- **Posting** – Make a post box out of a cereal box, lay out a few pictures or flashcards and ask your child to find 2 to post (e.g. 'Find the car and the bus'). Alternatively, use real objects/toys and have your child listen to the instruction then put the items in a bag. 
- **Vehicles** – Collect a few vehicles and toy figures and give directions with 2 key words (e.g. 'Put the man in the tractor', 'Put the horse in the trailer'). 
- **Tea party** – Use a teddy and a dolly and a play tea-set. Give directions such as 'Give teddy a cup', 'Give dolly a plate').
- **Washing** – Play bath-time with teddy and dolly too. Use a flannel or sponge (e.g. 'Wash teddy's nose', 'Wash dolly's hands').
- **Doctors** – Play doctors with teddy and dolly and use white stickers as plasters (e.g. 'Put a plaster on dolly's hand', 'Put one on teddy's head').

Remember, when working on key words, the focus is on understanding language without any other clues. Look at the child when giving instructions to stop yourself pointing or looking at the object you're requesting. Make sure there is a choice for each key word (e.g. 'Give teddy a cup' i.e. *teddy* or *dolly*, *cup* or *plate*).




Understanding 3 key words

Before your child can understand long sentences, they need to be able to understand key words and short phrases. Some instructions we give young children do not require them to understand the language. For example, when an adult says 'Put your boots on' while standing by the door and holding out the child's boots; or 'Line up at the door' while pointing to all the other children already lined up. In these situations, the child can understand what is meant from context and visual cues.



'Information-carrying words' are the key words which convey a sentence's meaning without any other clues. This is different from the actual number of words spoken in a sentence. Some children need to practice understanding language using key words. Some ideas are suggested below. Once your child can follow instructions with 2 key words consistently, try moving on to 3 key words. At 3 key word level, you may introduce words to describe size, colour or position.

Understanding 3 key words:

- **Dress up** – Have fun playing dress up. Give your child silly instructions with 3 key words (e.g. 'Put a sock on your head', 'Put the scarf on Mummy's feet'). 
- **Outdoors** – Choose 3 or 4 things you can see outside. Give 2 part directions for your child to follow and vary the action too (e.g. 'Run to the bench and the gate', 'Hop to the fence and the tree').
- **Shopping** – Take turns to be the shopkeeper and customer, give your child directions with 3 key words to remember (e.g. 'Can I have a banana, an orange and an apple'). 
- **Pack a bag** – Collect a range of different objects or pictures and ask your child to find 3 items to put in a bag or container. Turn this into a game such as packing a bag for holiday or making a magic potion (e.g. 'I'm going on holiday and I need a hat, a pen and my phone').
- **Vehicles** – Use different coloured vehicles and toy figures (e.g. 'Put the man in the red tractor'). 
- **Tea party** – Use a teddy and a dolly and a play tea-set. Give directions such as 'Give teddy an apple and a banana', 'Give dolly a cup and a plate').
- **Washing** – Play bath-time with teddy and dolly. Use a flannel or sponge, as well as a hairbrush and toothbrush (e.g. 'Wash teddy's nose', 'Brush dolly's teeth').
- **Hide and seek** – Use teddy and dolly or other toys/figures and take turns to choose where they are going to hide (e.g. 'Hide teddy under the chair', 'Hide dolly in the box').

Remember, when working on key words, the focus is on understanding language without any other clues. Look at the child when giving instructions to stop yourself pointing or looking at the object you're requesting. Make sure there is a choice for each key word (e.g. 'Put teddy under the chair' i.e. *teddy* or *dolly*, *on* or *under*, *chair* or *table*).



Understanding 4 key words

Before your child can understand long sentences, they need to be able to understand key words and short phrases. Some instructions we give young children do not require them to understand the language. For example, when an adult says 'Put your boots on' while standing by the door and holding out the child's boots; or 'Line up at the door' while pointing to all the other children already lined up. In these situations, the child can understand what is meant from context and visual cues.



'Information-carrying words' are the key words which convey a sentence's meaning without any other clues. This is different from the actual number of words spoken in a sentence. Some children need to practice understanding language using key words. Some ideas are suggested below. Once your child can follow instructions with 3 key words consistently, try moving on to 4 key words. You may need to prepare pictures or collect pairs of objects of different sizes or colours.

Understanding 4 key words:

- Shopping** – You will need different sized food items (e.g. big apple, little apple, big banana, little banana). Take turns to be the shopkeeper and customer, and ask for 2 items at a time (e.g. 'Can I have a big banana and a little apple'). 
- Pack for a holiday** – You will need a choice of characters (e.g. teddy and dolly), each with a bag and a box, and pictures of different coloured clothes (e.g. red sock, blue sock, red hat, blue hat). Ask your child to help pack for a holiday (e.g. Put a red hat in teddy's bag. Put a blue sock in dolly's box).
- Vehicles** – You will need different coloured vehicles (e.g. red car, blue car, red tractor, blue tractor) and a range of toy figures. Give directions such as 'Put the man and dog in the red tractor'. 
- Tea party** – You will need different coloured cups and bowls (e.g. red cup, blue cup, red bowl, blue bowl) and different sized food items (e.g. big apple, little apple, big cake, little cake). Give directions such as 'Put a big cake in the red bowl', 'Put a little apple in the blue cup'.
- Birthday party** – You will need different sized characters (e.g. big girl, little girl, big boy, little boy) and different coloured objects (e.g. red car, blue car, red bus, blue bus). Take turns to give presents to the characters, giving directions such as 'Give a red car to the big boy', 'Give a blue bus to the little girl'.
- Hide and seek** – You will need a choice of characters (e.g. teddy and dolly) and a table and chair. Use your child's favourite toys or figures and take turns to choose what action they are going to do and where (e.g. 'Make teddy sleep under the chair', 'Make dolly jump on the table').

Remember, when working on key words, the focus is on understanding language without any other clues. Look at the child when giving instructions to stop yourself pointing or looking at the object you're requesting. Make sure there is a choice for each key word (e.g. 'Give a red car to the big boy' i.e. *red or blue, car or bus, big or little, boy or girl*).