

## Colour coding

### What is it?

Colour coding is an approach that helps children with language problems. It helps:

- children who need help building their language
- children with language disorder or communication problems
- children who need help to say words in a sentence in the right order
- children who are helped by a structured approach to teaching early literacy skills

### How colour coding works

Colour coding works by helping children learn the roles different words have in a sentence. For example:

- 'who' words (**subject**) – this can be a person or animal
- 'what doing' words or action words (**verb**)
- 'what' words (**object**) – this could be an object or 'thing'

Colour coding helps show children where each word goes in the sentence. The colours help children to learn what each word means and how they fit together in the sentence. Colour coding helps children to learn new words and build vocabulary.

Using colour coding helps your child to understand 'wh' questions like who, what and what doing. It can help children who miss out words like 'is' and 'the' in a sentence.

### How to do it

We teach colour coding in this order:

- **The Verb** is taught first. Action words are important words in a sentence. They do not start the sentence but we practise these first. Verbs are words like reading, writing or jumping. We ask a 'what doing' question for red words
- **The Subject (who)** is practised next. Subject words can be people or animals e.g. man, lady, baby or dog. We ask a 'who' question when we teach blue words
- **The Object (what)** is practised when children can put who and what doing words in a sentence. They are what the sentence is about. We ask a 'what' question when practising yellow words.

We practise colour coding by using simple pictures, symbols and sentence strips.  
Here are some examples of sentences using a picture from the book 'Spot the dog – Happy birthday':



verb



subject + verb



verb + object



subject + verb + object



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Yorkshire Partnership**  
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There are different packs on the Barnsley speech and language therapy toolkit to work on colour coding. Your speech and language therapist will let you know which pack your child needs to work on. They should be introduced in the following order:

1. Colour coding 1: verbs
2. Colour coding 2: subject + verb
3. Colour coding 3: verb + object
4. Colour coding 4: subject + verb + object
5. Colour coding 5: longer sentences

### **Ways to practise colour coding**

The different packs in our toolkit will show you how to practise colour coding with your child. Your speech and language therapist may have given you some pictures to use with the pack.

It is important your child learns the colours and the questions that go with them.

You can also practise colour coding:

- With books – choose pictures from books your child enjoys and use colour coding to talk about what's happening
- Photos – take photos of your child through the day as they play. Use colour coding to talk about what is happening in the photo
- In written work – for older children who are starting to write, use colour coding to help them. Use the sentence strips as writing frames. You can also ask your child to underline the different types of words in a sentence using their colour coding to help them learn the different word types.

See our 'colour coding 1: verb pack to get started.

Colour Coding is based on the 'Colourful Semantics' work of A Bryan and has been developed in Barnsley by Fiona Hay of the Barnsley Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service.

If you have any questions please contact speech and language therapy

[www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk)

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