

3 & 4 Key word Levels

Children need to be able to follow key words to understand sentences and instructions. A key word is an important word in a sentence.

Your child needs to use key words in their talking to help get their message across.

Some children need help understanding key words. Your speech and language therapist will tell you:

- How many key words your child can follow in a sentence
- Activities to help your child build their understanding of key words
- Ways you can talk to your child throughout your day help their understanding

3 key word level

At 3 key word level your child must make a choice and follow 3 different words.

For example: 'Put the **little red** spoon on the **yellow** plate'



Your child needs to make a choice for 3 words in the sentence:

Put the **little** **red** spoon on the **yellow** plate

Big **blue** **green**

To follow the instruction correctly your child needs to follow 3 key words.

Your child can understand 3 key words when they follow instructions like this most of the time.

At 3 key word level, children will be starting to listen to instructions with words that are harder to understand. These can be:

- Describing words: 'Put the **big cup** on the **table**'
- Position words: 'put the **ball under** the **chair**'

Your child may find some types of words harder to follow. If you notice this do lots of modelling of these words throughout your day. Remember to help and show your child help when you use these words in instructions.

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4 Key Word level

At 4 key word level your child must make a choice and follow four different words.

For example: 'Put the **yellow fork** on the **little red** plate' –



Your child needs to make a choice for 4 words in the sentence:

Put the **yellow** **fork** on the **little** **red** plate
blue **spoon** **big** **blue**
red

To follow the all the instruction correctly they need to follow 4 key words.

At 4 key word level, your child is listening to even more difficult words. These can be harder to understand For example:

- Position words like 'in, on and under'. 'The shoe is **in** the box'.
- Describing words like colour and size: 'The **big blue** shoes are in the box'

Model these types of words to your child throughout the day. You might need to help them learn these words by showing them what to do.

Here are some more 4 key word instructions using different types of words:

'Put the **red cup** on the **table**'

'Put the **big shoes** under the **table**'

Using key words in your day:

Your speech and language therapist will give activities for you to practice following 3 or 4 key words with your child. You can do lots throughout your day to help too. You can try:

- Commenting and modelling words that your child finds hard to understand in daily routines. For example 'that's a big bowl', 'look a little ball'.
- Comment on what your child is doing when they play – add key words to the what your child says to help them hear more words.

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With all of us in mind.

- Use different action words in in your day – talk about what you are doing to model action words like jump, run stir
- Model describing words in your day. Activities such as baking, colouring and painting are great. You can use words like colours, hot and cold, messy, big, wiggly
- Using different words helps your child to understand them ready for their key word listening

See our advice sheet on 1 and 2 key word level if your child is not ready to do 3 and 4 key word instructions yet.

For more information about key word levels, see our videos on the [Barnsley Children's speech and language therapy Youtube channel](#).