

How to be an 'Echolalia Detective'

- **Echolalia** is when a child repeats words or sentences that they have heard from other people, videos, stories, or songs.



- Children can **use echolalia for communication**.

- The **words the child says might not match what they really mean**. This can be confusing. For example, a child might say "Remember to do good sitting" to ask for a snack at home, because they hear this every day at school before snack time.



- We need to **'tune in'** to the child's echolalia to work out what they are communicating to us. Their meaning isn't always obvious, so we need to do some 'detective work'.

- Just like a detective, we can **look for clues** to work out the meaning of a child's phrase.



- It helps to **follow the child's lead**. This means watching what they do and listening to what they say. Try to **join in with their play** rather than telling them what to do. It's important not to fill every silence with your own talking; sometimes children need us to stop and wait quietly. This gives them more opportunities to talk.

- Children can feel frustrated when the people around them do not understand what they are trying to communicate. When we work out what they mean and respond appropriately, it can help to **reduce this frustration**.



Looking for Clues

1. **Notice** which phrases your child uses frequently. Write them down.

2. **Who** - Can you work out who said this phrase originally?

- Is it from a film, TV show, story book, or video? If you don't know, you can search online to help you find out which film or tv show a phrase might have come from.



Watch the scene/video that the phrase comes from - what is the context of the phrase in the story? How is the character feeling when they say this phrase?

- Is it a phrase that is used frequently by someone at home or by staff at nursery/school? When do they say it?

3. **When** - Start to make a note of when the child uses this phrase:

- Before or during a specific task or activity
- When they are feeling a certain emotion
- When they see a particular toy, object, or person.
- When they are in a specific location or type of place
- In response to something someone else has said
- At a particular time of day e.g. bath time or bedtime
- They do a particular gesture or action



4. **Why** - Look at the clues you have and notice if there are any patterns that will help you to work out why the child is using this phrase. What could their intended message be?

5. **Share** – Once you know the meaning of the phrase, make sure to share this information with everyone who knows the child. It can be helpful to make a 'dictionary' of the child's phrases and their meanings that can be shared between home and school/nursery.



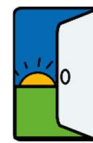
6. **Respond** - The next time your child uses the phrase:

- Repeat it back to them so that they know you are listening, you have heard them, and that what they say is important to you.
- Respond to what they have said and as you do, model a new helpful phrase that they could use next time. Remember to use 'I' if they would use 'I' in the sentence. For example, "I need some help".

How to be an 'Echolalia Detective' - Examples

Example - Sally

1. Sally's parents notice that she often says, "Time to line up!" at home but they don't know what she means by this. She gets frustrated when they don't respond.
2. Sally's parents know that they haven't used or heard this phrase at home, so they ask the nursery staff whether anyone says this at nursery. The nursery staff let them know that they say this phrase before the children line up to go out for break time.
3. Sally's parents notice that Sally often uses this phrase:
 - When she is standing by the back door at home
 - When they are in a shop
 - When she is getting frustrated or upset in public
4. Sally's parents look at the clues they have collected. They notice that Sally hears this phrase at nursery before she goes outside. They realise that Sally might be using this phrase to ask to leave a room or building.



The next time Sally says, "Time to line up!", she is by the back door at home. Sally's parents repeat the phrase back to her to show that they have understood, and then take her out to play in the garden. As they leave, they model a new helpful phrase, "Let's go outside!"

Example – Raj

1. Raj's teacher has noticed that he sometimes comes up to her and says, "Couldn't put humpty together again" several times. She is not sure what Raj means by this.
2. Raj's teacher recognises that this line is from a nursery rhyme but isn't sure where Raj has heard it. She asks Raj's parents and they let her know that Raj enjoys watching a cartoon video of this nursery rhyme. Raj's teacher watches the video and sees that when this line of the song is sung, you see 'Humpty' in hospital covered in plasters and looking sad.

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3. Raj's teacher notices that he usually uses this phrase:
 - Whilst putting his hand on a part of his body, such as his knee or his elbow.
 - When he is upset
 - Just after he has been playing in the playground



4. Raj's teacher looks at the clues she has collected. She realises that Raj might be using this phrase to communicate that he is hurt or poorly. Raj's teacher shares this information with Raj's parents by writing it in his 'dictionary'.

The next time Raj says, "Couldn't put humpty together again", Raj's teacher repeats the phrase from him to show that she is listening and looks to see he is pointing at his knee. She checks and sees that he has bruised his knee. She models a new helpful phrase, "I hurt myself".

Example – Taya

1. Taya's dad has noticed that she often says, "One slice of Swiss cheese". He's tried offering her cheese when she says this, but she pushes it away and gets frustrated. He doesn't understand why she keeps asking for cheese when she doesn't like it.
2. Taya's dad thinks about where she might have heard this phrase. He realises that this is a line from one of Taya's favourite books, 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'. He looks at the book and notices that this line is on a page with pictures of lots of different foods.
3. Taya's dad notices that Taya usually uses this phrase when she is in the kitchen.
4. Taya's dad looks at the clues he has. He realises that Taya might be using this phrase to ask for a snack, but not literally asking for Swiss cheese.

The next time Taya says, "One slice of Swiss cheese", her dad repeats the phrase from her to show that he is listening, and then offers her a choice of two snacks that she enjoys. When she reaches for her choice, he gives it to her and models a helpful new phrase, "I want a snack".

