

TIP SHEET 4

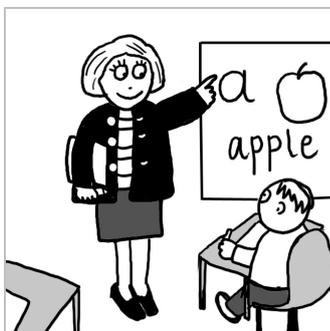


The advice given on this tip sheet is by Lucia Smith, Speech Pathologist.

It is based on experience from her clinical work along with her work consulting with teachers and parents.

It is difficult to address all children's communication styles in a single tip sheet.

If you are concerned about your child's speech or language development, please see a speech pathologist.



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10 TIPS FOR HELPING MY STUDENTS ATTEND IN CLASS

1. Consider Distractions

Distractions come in many forms. What *you* may view as an insignificant noise may be very difficult to filter out for some students. Distractions range from auditory (a bubbling fishtank, a noisy classroom next door, fans...) to visual (others playing sport outside the window, dangling mobiles) to tactile (carpet to rub, pens to tap). Watch and talk to your students - note and discuss types of distractions. If the distractions can't be removed, seat affected children away from these.

2. Provide a Plan

Providing the class with a plan can help students orient themselves to what is coming next. This has the effect of reducing anxiety and increasing attention for some students.

For younger children, it may be that the morning up to recess is scheduled in pictures. As each activity is completed, the picture is removed. A new schedule is then mapped out after recess until lunch. The teacher should talk through the plan as they point to each picture.

For older students, the teacher may find that they need to give a finer plan for each lesson. Give the broad topic for the lesson and then write a word or two for each step on the board where all students can see. If possible, draw a quick picture or symbol for each step.

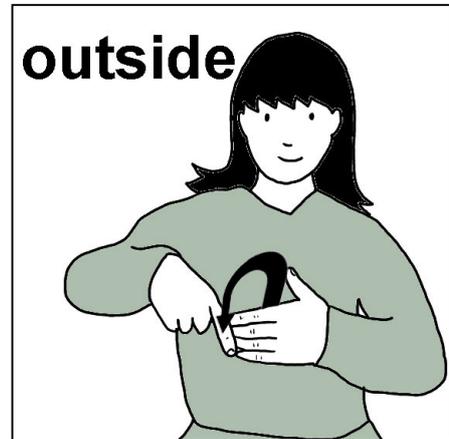
3. Your Style

As a teacher, it's a good idea to think about your communication style. Video-taping yourself in front of the class can give some great insights. Do you talk too fast? Do you change topics too quickly? Do you use visual cues? Develop your style and talk to the students about it. You might, for example, tell your class that when you hold up an index finger, you are making a very important point so they need to pay careful attention.

4. Sign Language

Many teachers find that using some sign language is helpful, particularly in the early years. These visual cues can assist children who have weak auditory skills. Learning signs like “STOP, LISTEN, WAIT, MORE, GREAT” etc... can supplement speech well. Signing is particularly useful when things are getting noisy. Trying to raise your voice above the noise sometimes leads to an even greater bedlam. Speaking quietly and using some sign can have an amazing effect of quietening a class. Always speak as you sign.

“Sign Language for Schools © ” is a fun resource to teach you and your class a whole set of signs that are relevant to a school setting. See www.pelican-talk.com and follow the links to SIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCES.



5. Words That Grab Attention

I have a set of phrases that I find work really well. I accompany these with sign language (see above) or gestures.

These phrases include... “Switch your ears on...” “Time to listen” “ Eyes to the front.”

Silly phrases work well too, especially when you pair them with a particular sing-song tone or voice. For example, you might do some rhyming tasks each morning as part of your literacy block... At the start say “It’s TIME TO RHYME!” and do a gesture. Before long, you’ll find that young students will start to copy these gestures. I find this helps students orient to the task at hand.

Some teachers I have seen use a clapping sequence as they say “Come to the mat.” Once again, this grabs attention.

Avoid using sentences like “Do you want to open your books please” or “Can everyone come to the mat.” To some students, these sound like questions – even subconsciously. Try : “It’s time to open your books” or “Come to the mat now everyone!” Be friendly, but direct.

6. Vocabulary

New subjects in class often bring new words with them. For students who have learning disabilities it can be beneficial to go through some of the new words separately before the subject begins. Even in the early years, children may struggle because they haven’t understood the language that is being used. Highlighting and explaining new words to the class is important.

7. Quirks

Many students with learning disabilities rely on consistency, but throwing in a bit of fun never goes astray. This can decrease students' anxieties and then you can then set the pace for learning later on. Why not start the class by showing something that creates interest and curiosity – or start with a puzzle or a trick? Alternatively, you can use these quirks as a treat for the end of class. Show this in your class plan... Write the fun item at the end of your lesson plan.

8. Asking for Help

Some students do not know how to ask for help when they get stuck. Instead they become disruptive. Discussing, in small groups or individually, what to do when you get stuck, can help students develop some useful strategies. When should you put up your hand and ask for help? What else can you do? Can you ask a friend or will this result in your friend losing concentration?

9. Interest and Relevance

Naturally, if you are interested in a subject, you are more likely to attend to someone speaking about it. There are, however, subjects that a student will find boring, but they must participate in. Trying to find the relevance for this subject is the key. A student needs to know *how they can benefit from learning* this information and how it will add to their life. This can be tricky, but be imaginative!

10. Break Down Steps and Have an End Point

Some students get “lost” in class as they do not understand the steps to complete a task. When asked “What are you meant to be doing?” they may be able to report very accurately the task, but have no idea how to start. Think about the steps involved. Break the task down and let students know the next one or two steps that they are required to complete. Particular students may need steps broken down even further. Giving an end point is also very important for some students. They may see a task as so large and complex that they feel totally overwhelmed. Set realistic expectations for what you wish each child to achieve in each session and let them know

A fantastic website that I find very useful is www.ldonline.org

Please email me with any questions – lucia@pelicantalk.com