

## ADVICE SHEET

### Supporting Autistic children who are Gestalt Language Processors

Traditional Speech & Language therapy has focused on strategies that support Analytical (typical) Language Processors. An Analytical Language processor learns single words as units first and moves towards combining words into different phrases and sentences. However, it is now believed that Autistic children are Gestalt Language Processors, which involves the child imitating phrases (gestalts) he or she has previously heard, breaking them down into individual words and then using them to build novel phrases and sentences to communicate. Both are ways of learning language.

Different ways of acquiring language requires different language support. Some strategies will overlap, however, if we're solely using strategies meant for analytic language processors with early stage gestalt language processors, it will hold them back in their language development.

'Gestalts' refer to what would we have previously identified as **delayed echolalia**; a whole unit of language repeated after a period of time. We now understand that meanings are assigned to the gestalts, for example "plaster" could be linked to any illness.

#### **Typically recommended strategies for analytic language processors**

- Labelling nouns (objects, pictures, books, and flashcards) to increase word count/increase vocabulary.
- Expanding utterances (e.g. modelling 2 word combinations if a child says one word. E.g. Child says "Ball" Adult says "Blue ball" )
- Using cloze phrase or fill in the blank (e.g. "The Wheels on the (pause)\_\_\_\_" and waiting for child to say "bus")
- Asking wh-questions like "What's this?" with expectation of a response/answer.
- Focusing on grammar early on in language development.

### **Recommended strategies for Gestalt language processors**

- Focus on interactions being child led; have activities that are fun & low pressure
- Acknowledge and honour repeated language as being communicative by a nod, smile, an ok or repetition
- Try and be detectives when they use gestalts- attempt to work out what their phrase or sentence means. It will often be tied to a meaningful experience for them
- Model language naturally in play and focus on declarative language (narrating, commenting), don't model single words or ask questions.
- Keep your voice tuneful and animated; (their language will have a lot of intonation).
- Don't be afraid of silences
- Use music and singing songs on a daily basis.
- If they are using a large number of gestalts try adding new parts for e.g. the child says 'Let's go' and adult can add 'Let's go... the park or to the shops'

## **THINK CHILD**

**C**hild led

**H**onour/hear all communication

**I**nvigate/detective work

**L**anguage that's natural

**D**ecrease questions & directives

**If you want to learn more follow 'Meaningful Speech LLC' on Social Media**



(Based on information from Meaningful Speech & KCH NHS Foundation Trust 2024)