

### Understanding Abstract Language At Blank Level 4

Language and how it is structured is complex. To try and make it simpler, **Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978)** created the Blanks levels of questioning. This is a framework which helps us to think about how some types of questions and sentences are more difficult to understand than others.

The Blanks levels split language into **concrete** and **abstract concepts**. Concrete language is usually easier to understand than abstract language.

**Concrete language:** This includes simple naming words (nouns), action words (verbs) and describing words (adjectives).

**Abstract language:** These are words that you can't see such as 'imagination', 'thinking', 'how' and 'why'.

Level 4 is the most complex. Children have to talk about why things happen and make predictions about what might happen based upon past experiences. They have to clearly explain their decisions. Examples include;

- Justify a prediction
- Identify the cause
- Solve a problem
- Solve a problem from another person's point of view
- Make an inference from an observation
- Explain why something cannot be done
- Select a means to a goal
- Explain the logic of compound words

### Cueing techniques

If your child does not understand you, there are different ways you can help. These techniques help to scaffold your child's understanding and should be gradually dropped as your child's understanding improves. Try the following suggestions:

- **Give time** – make sure you have given your child enough time to respond.
- **Delay** – make sure your child has waited until you have finished your request.
- **Focus attention** – make sure your child is looking at you and listening to your request.
- **Repeat** – repeat the request again.
- **Simplify** – break your request down into parts or make it simpler.
- **Use questions to clarify** – check your child understands by asking them questions.
- **Focus on the feature** – help your child focus on the feature she/he needs to look at to be able to understand your question. For example if you're asking how two items are alike, you can draw their attention to the relevant similarity such as colour or size.
- **Forced alternatives** – give your child two alternatives for example "What is he doing? Is he running or jumping?"
- **Sound/syllable cues** – give the first sound or syllable of the answer.
- **Gesture** – use gesture to help your child understand or to cue them in to the answer.
- **Rephrase** – repeat the question in a different way.
- **Sentence completion** – give the answer sentence for your child to complete. For example "What colour is it? It's....."
- **Demonstration** – show the answer without talking and then ask again. For example "What would happen if we put water in this broken cup?" Then demonstrate.
- **Experience the concept** – help the child experience the answer. For example "How does it feel? Touch it."
- **Relate known to unknown** – help the child to relate the request to previous experiences. For example "The spaghetti is hard. How will it feel after it is cooked? Remember when we cooked the potatoes? How did they feel?"