



Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Using Core Words

What are 'core words'?

Core words are words that are used lots in everyday life. For example, 'go', 'stop', 'more', 'help' and 'like' are all core words. They are words that can be used in lots of different scenarios and places.

For example, using '**go**' you could say:

'Ready, steady, **go**!'

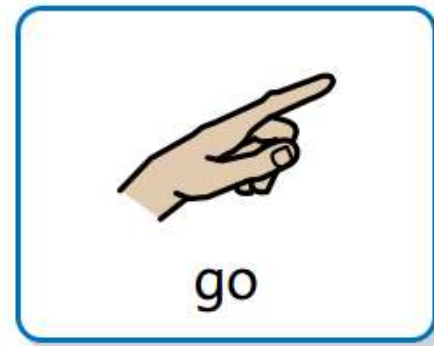
'Let's **go** outside'

'Where did the bubbles **go**?'

'I want to **go** to the park'

'**Go** away'

'Look at the train **go**!'

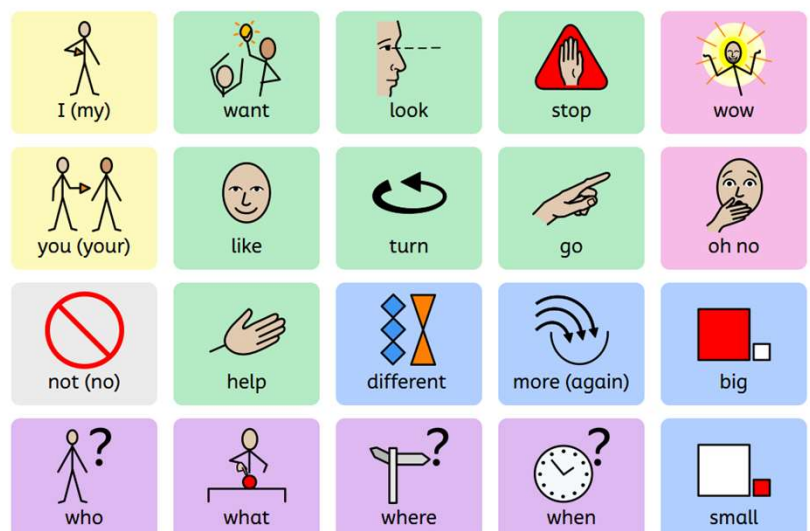


Core words make up about 80% of the words that we use. The other 20% are more specific words. This includes a lot of nouns – people, places and objects. For example, 'toilet', 'Gruffalo', 'banana' and 'Peppa Pig'. These are sometimes called 'fringe' words.

What is a 'core word board'?

A core word board is a single page with lots of different core words on it. These are usually represented by symbols. Some core word boards have just a few symbols on them, and some have lots – it depends on how much language the child needs.

Core Vocab



How to introduce core words

We introduce symbols by **modelling** them. This means pointing to a symbols that matches what you are saying and the situation you are in. You don't have to point to every word you say. For example, if a child is struggling to put their shoes on, you could say 'let me **help** you' and point to the '**help**' symbol.

Top tips on introducing core words

1. **Choose a core word board and use the same one across different environments** (e.g. school, home, at the playground, in the community). This helps children learn where the words are.
2. **Create opportunities to use it** . Use it at different times throughout the whole day, not just in one activity.
3. **Model without putting pressure on the child to use it.** Children learn by watching and listening, you don not need to test them or ask them to find symbols.
4. **Model it for lots of different types of messages.** For example, to ask for something, to make a comment, protest, share an opinion, ask a question or express feelings.
5. **Pick one word a week to focus on.** This helps children learn what the word means and how they can use it.
6. **Give thoughtful pauses.** Once you have modelled a symbol, pause and give the child time to process and respond if they want to. If they don't respond, that's okay! Just keep modelling.
7. **Keep responding to all the ways your child communicates,** not just symbols (e.g. pointing, gesture, facial expressions, using their voice for sounds or words).
8. **Have fun** and explore the language together!

Further resources

You can download an example core word board from our website. To learn more about how to use symbols, you can attend our training 'Getting started with symbols'. The link to book on to this is on our website (below).

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child's communication differences, you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice: [York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - Speech and language therapy \(yorkhospitals.nhs.uk\)](https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/teaching-hospitals-nhs-foundation-trust-speech-and-language-therapy)
- Contact us via our 'Request for Help' line – see our website for further details