

Echolalia

Echolalia is the repetition of words or phrases. It can be immediate; where the child will copy what has been said to them at the time, or delayed; where the child will repeat language heard previously e.g. TV, films, or conversations with adults.

The reasons for echolalia can vary but overall it is a sign that language has been heard and is being processed or learnt. Immediate echolalia can support processing of language by giving the child more time. It also indicates a turn in a conversation, the child may not know what to say but is aware that it is their turn to speak. When provided with a choice a child may respond with the last choice presented, even though this is not what they want.

Immediate echolalia occurs when children begin to understand the function of words but have difficulty processing their meaning quick enough to give an appropriate reply. Delayed echolalia can occur, minutes, days or years after the words were first heard, it can be repeated at any time or place.

Delayed echolalia can self-stimulatory, as if the child is reliving the book or film in their mind. This can be a very solitary activity and can be a cue to engage the child in a more constructive activity. Delayed echolalia can be used to express mood, when a child is feeling a strong emotion they may repeat a phrase heard when they felt that emotion previously or what a character in a film has said. For example when a child was not happy and did not want to do something he repeated 'I'm not taking you out to dinner' a phrase from his favourite film. It may also be used to report significant events from the day, it can be a child's way of sharing their news e.g. if repeating phrases heard in nursery or school.

Top tips for echolalia

- Use simple language to help your child understand
- Use visual strategies to support understanding
- Model language associated with behaviour e.g. child reaches for a drink, say 'I want drink.'
- If using delayed echolalia to express emotions, acknowledge the feelings and model suitable language e.g. 'Yes it is sad, I'm feeling sad.'
- Use visual information to support express, choices.
- Provide scaffolding for language then complete sentence e.g. what did we see? We saw a...'cat' - 'we saw a cat.'
- Always respond to communicative echolalia.
- Teach specific questions and a direct response: Choose 10 questions and prepare standard responses. Use visual cues to support your child to answer. Adult models and scaffolds answers until correct response is given. These responses are then practised.