Understanding Concepts

What are concepts?

Concepts help a child to understand about direction, location, position, number, quantity, sequence, attributes, dimension, size and similarities and differences.

In order to function in society one must learn the rules and structures of the language system. One structure of language that helps a child to become more specific in their understanding and use of language is the knowledge of concepts.

Why is understanding concepts important?

It is important for children to have a good understanding of different concepts as it assists in their ability to follow instructions and be specific in what they are talking about. In order for a child to use concepts in their spoken language, they first need to have a good understanding about what these concepts are and what they mean. By developing this understanding they are then better able to follow
instructions at home, at preschool and in the school environment.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop the understanding of concepts?

- **Hearing:** A child needs to have adequate hearing abilities to ensure that they can hear appropriate language models, and therefore use appropriate language.

- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.

- **Play skills:** Voluntary engagement in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment where the activities may be, but are not necessarily, goal oriented.

- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension of language. Understanding of language develops before expressive language. In order to be able to use language appropriately, a child first needs to be able to understand the specific language area. The difference between what a child understands and what they can say is about 5:1 between the ages of 2-3½ years (i.e. the child knows a lot more than what they can say).

How can you tell if my child has problems understanding concepts?

If a child has difficulties with understanding concepts they might:

- Struggle to follow instructions containing concepts.
- Use incorrect concepts in their expressive (spoken) language (e.g. when something is ‘on’ the table the child may say it is ‘up’ the table).
- Not be able to be specific when talking and has a tendency to use vague statements such as ‘that one’ or ‘thingy’ or uses gestures such as pointing rather than using their words (e.g. asks for ‘that one there’ rather than saying something more specific such as “I would like the big, red car please”).

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What other problems can occur when a child has concept difficulties?

When a child has concept difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Following instructions:** The ability to independently complete tasks/instructions upon request.

- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension of language.

- **Expressive (using) language:** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.

- **Drawing pictures:** Unable to conceptualise what it looks like.

- **Puzzle completion.**

- **Problem solving:** The identification of a challenge, including what the challenge is, what strategies could be used to overcome it, and the subsequent performance to overcome it.

- **Literacy:** Reading and writing.

- **Play skills:** Voluntary engagement in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment where the activities may be, but are not necessarily, goal oriented.

What can be done to improve the understanding of concepts?

- **Modelling grammar:** When the child says something that is grammatically (conceptually) incorrect, model to them the correct way of saying the sentence (e.g. Child: “I want the one up the table” Adult: “I want the one on the table”).

- **Physically modelling/showing** the child what to do when giving them an instruction so that they can ‘see’ what the concept within the instruction looks like.

- **Describe** to your child what they are doing (e.g. when the child is packing up their toys you might say: “Put the toys in the box” or when dressing/undressing you might say: “Put your shoes on/Take your shoes off”).

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- **Emphasise** the word you want the child to learn about and repeat the concept in a variety of situations/settings so that the child sees the different ways in which a concept can be used (e.g. ‘Turn the lights on’ in comparison to ‘The book is on the table’).

**What activities can help improve concept development?**

- **Reading story books** that have flaps and discuss locations (e.g. Spot books – Where is Spot? He is *behind* the door).
- **Following instructions**: In play ask the child to follow instructions containing age appropriate concepts (e.g. “Let’s feed the *big* bear” or “Drive your car *under* the table”).
- **Play games** where you take it in turns to hide toys around the room (e.g. “Put the car on the table” or “Hide your teddy *behind* the couch”).
- **Hide and Seek**: Once you locate the child or they locate you, get them to say where they were hiding (e.g. *In* the cupboard, *under* the bed, *behind* the curtain).
- **Sing songs** that involve concepts (e.g. I’m going up; If you’re happy and you know it; Build it Up; Wet washing hanging on the line). A lot of Playschool Sound Tracks will have songs that discuss different concepts.
- **Teaching colours**: Place the child’s favourite snack or toy in containers with different coloured lids. To get the item they have to name the colour correctly.
- **Scavenger hunt**: Go on a scavenger hunt and find items that are all a particular colour (e.g. find a bucket of red items – apple, car, and crayon).
- **Wash dishes**: (Teaching wet/dry) Wash the dishes and encourage your child to either make the dishes ‘wet’ or ‘dry’.

**Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with understanding concepts in my child?**

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with concept difficulties is important to:

- Enable a child to be able to cope better in the kindergarten and school environment as they will be better equipped to follow instructions.
- Enable a child to be a more active participant in classroom activities.
- Enhance a child’s vocabulary and ability to communicate with others.

If left untreated what can difficulties understanding concepts lead to?

When children have difficulties with understanding concepts, they might also have difficulties with:

- Following instructions within the home, preschool or school environment.
- Restricted vocabulary whereby a child cannot clearly get their message across.
- Bullying when others become more aware of a child’s difficulties.
- Literacy difficulties including reading and writing.

What type of therapy is recommended for understanding concept difficulties?

If your child has difficulties understanding concepts, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just understanding concepts) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)