

Key Words



What are key words and why do we use them?

- When we talk, **there are clues** around us that help the child understand what is being said. This is the way babies learn language; you point at the object and say its name. Then they can make the association between the item and the spoken word.
- Key words or Information Carrying Words (ICW's) enable us to find out how much language a child understands without the support of any visual clues (e.g. eye pointing, pointing and nodding).
- The key idea is that the information carrying words in a sentence are the words that the child **MUST** understand to be able to do what they have been asked. This is different to the number of words actually spoken.
- A key word is a word that carries meaning. Many instructions we can give young children involve words that carry no meaning, if we think about the situation.

For example, the child is in their room getting dressed and their parent is holding out the jumper and says 'put your jumper on'.



In this situation, the child does not need to understand any of the words because he can see what is needed from the clues in the situation.

Strategies to Ensure Success before working on ICW's

- Encourage the child to **look at you rather than the objects**, while you give the instruction. If they look at the objects, they may use their visual memory to remember which items.
- Ensure your child is **familiar with the names of all the items you will be using** – this way you can be sure that it is following the instruction rather than their vocabulary knowledge that is being tested.
- When giving instructions, if necessary, REMEMBER! SIT ON YOUR HANDS AND LOOK AT THE CHILD! This will help you to **stop yourself from pointing or looking at the object you're requesting**, as children can be very quick to use clues from the situation.
- Be careful **not to split longer instructions up** as this won't accurately test their understanding of it e.g. "can you find me the cat.... and the dog". If they really struggle with following the instructions however, you could try this afterwards to help them experience success.

- Always **check that your child has to make a choice** between objects for each ICW you're testing. These do not always need to be separate objects as there may be a natural choice e.g. actions/ body parts etc
- Use a range of types of words including:
 - Subject: person that can perform an action, be it an actual person or creature
 - Action/verb: doing word e.g. running, sitting, painting etc.
 - Object: any item that an action can be performed on
 - Preposition: position words like in, on, under, next to, behind etc.
 - Concept: e.g. big, little, colours, wet, dry etc.
 - Place: a location e.g. field, barn, garden

Typical Development

Number of ICW's understood	Age Equivalent
2	2 years
3	3 years
	Add concepts e.g. size, colour, number at 3 years or 3 ICW's
4	4 years



Activity ideas

Here are some examples of instructions for 1-4 ICW's. Each example shows you what items you would need to make it work and the ICW is underlined to show an available choice. Remember not to point or give other clues to the correct answer.



1 ICW instructions

- You need: a ball/ a car "find me the ball" (vs Car)
- You need: teddy "make teddy jump" (vs Sit)
- You need: teddy "Show me Teddy's eyes" (vs Nose)

2 ICW instructions:

You need: a ball, a car, a train, a teddy.

Ask: "find me the ball and train"
car teddy



You need: teddy, dog .

Say: "make teddy jump"
dog sit



You need: teddy.

Say: "show me teddy's nose and ears"
eyes head

3 ICW instructions:

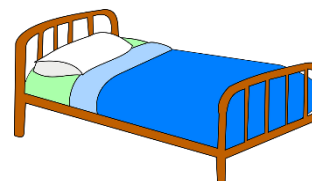
You need: a rabbit, a cat, a table, a chair.

Say: "Put rabbit under the chair"
cat on table



You need: teddy, dolly, bed, chair .

Say: "make teddy jump on the bed"
dolly sit chair



You need: pen, fork, doll & teddy (teddy & doll each with a box & a cup)

Say: "Put the pen in dolly's cup"
fork teddy's box

4 ICW instructions:

You need: pictures of a big/little girl & boy in clothes and colouring pens

Say: "Colour the big girl's trousers blue"
small boy's shoes red



You need: animals and a choice of 2 places e.g. table and chair

Say: "Make the cow and horse jump on the "table"
pig sheep lay chair

You need: dolly and teddy with their own teaset; and big and little cutlery.

Say: "put the big spoon in dolly's bowl"
small fork teddy's cup

