

Improving Your Child's Comprehension Of "WH" Questions

Basic "WH" questions for comprehension consist of the following:

- Where is (target item)?
- Where is the one that is (attribute)?
- What do you (use/function) with?
- Who?
- Where?



To demonstrate understanding or comprehension of one of these questions, a child does not need to verbally name the item, action, or location (which would also include sign/gesture, show picture, etc.). The child would only need to point to the appropriate item to indicate that he/she understood the question.

When attempting to increase a child's ability to understand these questions, it is best to do so in context (i.e. in play, while reading a book, etc.), not drilling them repeatedly on various WH questions.



The most basic of these questions, could be considered the "**where is the target item?**" as the child only needs to locate the item by either getting it or pointing to it. This is really just another way of asking the child "point to the item." For example, you could be looking at a book and ask the child, where is the bear? Once the child points the bear, you should reinforce his/her action ("You found the bear!") and then expand by adding some new information about the bear (i.e. "the bear is brown," "the bear is sleeping," or the "bear is in the cave"). Offering the child more information (through expansions) will help the child learn more vocabulary and will facilitate their ability to answer various WH questions later.

The next WH question is "**Where is the one that is (attribute/function/action)?**" You could also present this question as, "what do you (use/function) with?" Although the child is still responding via a gesture such as pointing, he/she needs to have some knowledge of an item's familiar characteristics such as color, size, shape, function. For example, you could be looking at a book about different pets, and ask the child "where is the one that barks/says woof?" or "where is the one that eats a bone?" Being able to respond appropriately about a function of an item is a higher level skill than being able to simply identify it by name or what it physically looks like (i.e. color or size).

When just beginning to work on this, it is best to focus on a page that only contains 1-2 items. If you are playing, offer the child 2 choices. As your child becomes more proficient at responding to these questions, you can increase difficulty by making the items more similar or increase the array size (the number of possible choices). As stated previously, make sure to reinforce your child's action when correct (i.e. "you're right the dog barks!").

"Who ?" This is a great one to practice while looking through a book. Chances are there are several different actions occurring on one page. For example, you may be looking at a book with your child, and one page contains several characters in the kitchen, each engaged in a different activity. You could ask your child, "who is cooking?" or "who is eating?" This is a great time to remind children that when we ask "**who**," we are looking for a **person or a character**. Again, your child only needs to point to the appropriate character. It is very important that you make sure that you are providing expansions as you reinforce his/her actions. For example, you could ask your child "who is cooking?" When the child points to the man cooking, you will want to say something like "you're right, the dad is cooking eggs" or "you're right, the dad is cooking in the kitchen." Your expansions are providing the much needed verbal models that your child needs in order to be able to *answer* questions later on (see expressive language page for more information on this topic).

"Where ...?" You can practice this skill in a variety of different ways; while playing cars, while playing hide and seek, or while reading a book. Let's look at a few examples... while playing with cars, you can place a car in specific location such as on top of the car ramp or under a block. Ask your child "where is my blue car?" During the time that you are searching for the car, it is important that you verbally narrate your actions as well as your child's i.e. "hmm, is it under the box? No, the car is not under the box. I see you looking on the ramp. You found it! The car is on top of the ramp." While playing hide and seek, ask your child to hide and narrate out loud as you try to find your child. For example, once your child is tucked away in his/her hiding space, you can say out loud "where is (name) hiding?" As you search through the house, make sure to verbally narrate your actions, "you are not *under* the bed," "you are not *in* the closet," "where is (name) hiding?" "I found you! You were *behind* the pillows." Verbally modeling these specific locations (or spatial concept terms) will facilitate your child's ability to *answer* where questions later. When working on where questions within a book, it is helpful to remind children that when we ask "**where**," we are looking for a **place or location**.

What Do I Do If My Child Has Difficulty Responding To These Questions?

You can assist your child by prompting them or helping them find the answer.

Start with the least invasive assistance. So, if you are trying to have your child identify an item, present the question "where is the bear?" **and wait**. If your child does not respond, present the question again and then draw attention to the area that item is in (i.e. gesture to the general area on the page, but *not* the target item). If he/she is unable to identify the item, point to 2 different items i.e. bear and tiger and present the question again "where is the bear?" and wait.

If your child is still unable to identify the bear, present the question again “where is the bear” and then model the appropriate response (*you* touch the bear) and then say “there’s the bear!” You can always follow this up by having your child touch the bear and remembering to verbally reinforce their actions “great job! You found the bear!!!”

You can follow this procedure to assist your child in responding to any of the WH questions.



Reminder: Providing expansions (verbal models as well as additional information) will facilitate your child’s ability to verbally answer a variety of WH questions.