



Information Carrying Words (ICWs)

The idea of ICWs has been used by Speech and Language Therapists for a long time to think about how children understand and use words.

What is an ICW?

- An ICW is a word that carries meaning. The child has to understand an ICW in order to be able to understand and follow an instruction correctly.
- The idea of ICWs provides a structured framework which we can use to tailor our language and support a child's understanding within everyday activities.

Examples of ICWs

- 0 ICWs

Imagine your child is in their room getting dressed at the usual time as part of a familiar routine and you hold out their jumper and say '*where's your jumper?*' Your child does not actually have to understand any of the words said because they can see what is required from the context and the experience of this routine.

- 1 ICW

Imagine the scenario above, but this time there is an array of clothes on the floor and you are not holding an item out. When you say '*where's your jumper?*' this time, the child has to understand the word jumper as there is a selection to choose from. This means the word jumper is now an ICW in this example.



- 2 ICWs

Adding another person to a role play situation would enable you to move on to a 2 ICW level, e.g. if you had selection of Jack and Zoe's clothes. Imagine you ask the child, '*where is Zoe's coat?*' This would be an example of a 2 ICW question as your child has to understand Zoe rather than Jack, and then coat rather than hat or shoes etc.

- 3 ICWs

Moving language to a 3 ICW level can be done by adding components such as size or place to commands, e.g. 'put the jumper under the table' or 'put the big hat in the bag'.



How can I use ICW principles with my child?

Your child's Speech and Language Therapist may assess your child's skills using the principles of ICWs. Once you know the level your child is working at, you can:

- Support their understanding in everyday activities by reducing the level of your language to match.
- Provide opportunities to stretch and develop your child's understanding by working on some activities at the level above, e.g. if you know your child understands 2 ICW instructions, try adding some with 3 ICWs into play.

Your Speech and Language Therapist will be able to suggest appropriate activities and guide you to relevant resources for your child.

What level should I expect from my child?

As a general guide, children will usually develop their understanding as shown below:

Age (years)	No of ICWs understood
2	2
3	3
4	4

Please remember that all children develop differently though and the above ages are here as a rough guide only!

If you're worried, please speak to your child's Speech and Language Therapist for advice and support ☺

