

# Support understanding

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Key areas to support' from the Guide: [Speech, Language and Communication](#)

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## **Includes:**

- Identify difficulties in understanding language
- Check for understanding
- Reduce barriers to understanding
- Support understanding with visuals
- Use visuals
- Teach non-verbal communication

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Speech, Language and Communication](#)

Strategy: [Key areas to support](#)

Suggestion: [Support understanding](#)

Date

25 June 2026

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/speech-language-and-communication/support-understanding](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/speech-language-and-communication/support-understanding)

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## Identify difficulties in understanding language

Recognise and respond to the challenges created when students have difficulties understanding words and language.

Learners who have difficulty understanding may find it challenging to:

- follow instructions
- pay attention and listen
- respond appropriately to questions and requests
- use language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas
- form friendships and engage in positive social interactions
- understand body language
- understand what went wrong, especially in high stress situations
- complete tests, exams, and academic tasks in higher level education.

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## Check for understanding



**Source:**

Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

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Work with your learners to ensure they have understood and interpreted correctly the message being conveyed.

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## Reduce barriers to understanding

Suggestions to support understanding.

- ✓ Use visuals to give instructions or show a routine. Allow students to revisit and repeat key learning.
- ✓ Chunk instructions and use vocabulary that is familiar to students.
- ✓ Get the learner's attention before speaking.
- ✓ Reduce classroom noise.
- ✓ Check understanding of key concepts and vocabulary and make connections with prior learning.
- ✓ Use graphic organisers to support thinking and planning.
- ✓ Allow for processing time.
- ✓ Ensure instructions are in the order they are to happen.
- ✓ Use microphones and sound systems when available, especially when talking to large groups, such as whole school assemblies.

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## Support understanding with visuals

### Making a banana smoothie

1.  
Collect  
ingredients



2.  
Blend ingredients  
together



3.  
Drink your  
smoothie



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## Use visuals

Build a shared understanding of the meaning of visuals.

Some students may focus on unexpected parts of the image that you have not noticed, for example, items in the background.

- ✓ Make visuals of daily tasks, processes and steps.
- ✓ Use visuals that are relevant to the New Zealand context.
- ✓ Label resources with visuals, colours and text for easy identification.
- ✓ Make resources easy to find by using clearly divided zones, for example a maths resources zone.
- ✓ Use charts, visual calendars, colour-coded schedules, visible timers, and visual cues to increase the predictability of regular activities.
- ✓ Offer graphic organisers and flowcharts to break tasks into shorter chunks.
- ✓ Use visuals, social stories and video models to support learning of new skills or behaviours.
- ✓ Provide feedback in visual as well as verbal formats. Visual formats include written comments and things such as symbols and smiley faces.

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## Teach non-verbal communication

Non-verbal cues can support students' understanding of what others might be thinking or feeling.

- ✓ Help students learn to notice facial expressions and body posture during interactions. Highlight examples in stories, video clips, or use the [emotions colour wheel](#).
- ✓ Role-play in small groups to practise recognising the meaning conveyed in postures and vocal intonations.
- ✓ Cue students to recognise common hand signs that are used in a classroom, such as recognising the palm facing forward to mean stop.
- ✓ Learn about how emojis and memes are used.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for students to watch short video clips with the sound off. Ask students what they think is happening by analysing the postures and the movements of the actors.
- ✓ Play charades or pantomimes and have students guess the message. This helps to draw attention to the meaning in body posturing.

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