

# Understanding Ambiguous Language

*Some children take language very literally and they will find ambiguous language difficult.*

Type of ambiguous language	What you can do to help
<p><b>Words with more than one meaning</b> e.g. bat (toy or animal), son and sun etc.</p>	<p>⇒ Encourage them to think about the context in which the word is heard / read. ⇒ Teach both meanings as necessary.</p>
<p><b>Sayings</b> e.g. 'pull your socks up' 'over the moon' 'look before you leap</p>	<p>⇒ If you use ambiguous language check they have understood. ⇒ If not ask them to think about whether their interpretation makes sense using clues from the situation. ⇒ Encourage and guide them to think of alternative meanings. ⇒ Teach common metaphors and proverbs.</p>
<p><b>Implied meaning</b> e.g. 'I'm thirsty' (meaning: I want a drink), 'it's cold in here' (meaning: I want the window shut).</p>	<p>⇒ They are likely to take this at face value rather than realising what they've been asked to do. ⇒ You may need to ask them 'What do I want you to do?'</p>
<p><b>Understanding emotion from tone of voice</b> When the tone of voice conflicts with the words used e.g. 'I'm so happy' - said in a sad way. Sarcasm and irony can be very difficult to understand.</p>	<p>⇒ The child may respond to the words used rather than the tone of voice ⇒ Don't expect the child to understand how you or others are feeling. ⇒ Tell them explicitly. ⇒ Use thinking and speech bubbles to help explain why people may say one thing but think or say another.</p>
<p><b>Literal understanding / rigid adherence to rules</b> e.g. 'I'll be two minutes'. Child prompts you when exactly two minutes have passed.</p>	<p>⇒ Use words like usually, about, around etc. For example 'We usually have lunch about 1.00'.</p>