

Why should we learn words from a child's home language?

Core words are functional words that children can use for a variety of purposes to get many different wants and needs met. When children use these words, it gives them independence and control. If a child's English language is limited, they may communicate these words in their home language. If we do not know what these core words are in the child's home language, then we cannot meet their needs as effectively as we could do otherwise.

We can work with parents to develop our own knowledge of generic core words or terms in the child's home language, as well as other words which are specific to the family, to ensure an individualised approach. We can then use the words to help meet the needs and wants of the child when they are with us, so they begin to feel welcome and empowered.

The core words or terms we should focus on learning include those that help the child:

- Make an impact on their world.
- Feel good about accomplishing something.
- Build relationships with you, other staff members and their peers.
- Increase their levels of self-esteem and independence.

Core words or terms should be ones that are used daily at home, and which can be used routinely in the group/setting. Words or terms that are used more routinely will be easier for staff to learn as they will have opportunities to use them more often. Words that are linked to the child's needs or wants are high value as they are more motivating. These words are more likely to encourage a child to initiate an interaction and engage the child in an activity they can share with you. This interaction fills a social need. It could reduce the length of time the child spends in the 'silent period' and it might also often end up being a learning experience which simultaneously encourages the strengthening of our relationship with the child.

We have taken the idea of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need and have added some **examples** of related core words or terms that you might choose to learn in the illustration below:



(The text has been adapted from the article 'Developing Your Child's Language the Right Way' (2019), written by Joanne Ravell, Speech Language Pathologist, as shown on [Teaching your child functional language | Toptots](#))