**Concepts**

A concept is an idea that allows us to describe things and talk about what we have done or are going to do. Children learn concepts with distinctive attributes first, i.e., thing that can be seen, felt, or drawn. These might include size or texture.

To develop a child’s understanding of concepts, e.g., shapes, they will need to experience the concepts in a range of different situations. For example, to understand the word ‘dirty’, a child needs to experience a range of situations where that word applies, e.g., dirty boots, dirty hands, dirty car, as well as being taught the concept in more structured activities.

A concept should be targeted one at a time, e.g., little then big, cold then hot, dirty then clean etc. It is important not to teach opposites at the same time, e.g., do not teach big and small together as something may be medium size. Instead start with ‘big’ and ‘not big’.

It is important to use a multi-sensory approach. For example, if you are teaching the concept ‘next to’:

* Get the child to experience the concept, e.g., put themselves next to a variety of objects. This movement, e.g., in a PE lesson gives a kinaesthetic experience.
* Get the child to put an object experiencing the concept, e.g., put a character ‘next to’ a variety of objects. This tactile input reinforces the learning.
* Use simple language to talk about the concept, e.g., “The teddy is next to the chair”.
* Use pictures/ gesture for visual reinforcement.
* Talk about past and future experiences which uses the concept.

Begin with the concrete activity, progress to the pictorial task and then the abstract.

Choose teaching materials carefully (e.g., when teaching the concept ‘small’ make sure the objects are not all hard or the child might think that ‘small’ = ‘hard’).

Repeat activities frequently (i.e., little and often).

Ensure generalisation so that once the concept has been understood, you begin to widen the experience by introducing the concept in other situations.

Teach through matching and sorting activities.

This table is based on Ann Locke’s ‘Living Language’ programme. Locke states that the different word lists should not be adhered to rigidly but that the words listed in the first column should be learnt at one level before proceeding to the next.

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|  | **Basic concepts** |  |  | **Difficult concepts** |
| **Size** | Big, little, heavy | Empty, fat, full, long, small | Biggest, large, light, short, tall, thin, bigger, fattest, heaviest, longest, smallest | Deep, narrow, shallow, thick, wide, fatter, heavier, longer, smaller, largest, lightest, shortest, tallest, thinnest |
| **Space** | In, on, under, off, out, up | In front, behind, near, next to, by, outside, top, over, through | Beside, backwards, back, between, far, front, high, low, middle, side, together, towards,  | above, across, against, apart, below, facing, sideways, upright |
| **Texture** | Hard, soft | Cold, dry, wet, hot | Furry, rough, smooth, warm |  |
| **Sound** | Noisy, quiet/ly | Loud/ly, soft/ly |  | High, low |
| **Shape** | Dot, spot, line, round | Circle, flat, square | Cross, triangle | Corner, curved, diamond, oval, rectangle, shape, slant/ slope, straight |
| **Movement** | Fast, slow/ly | Moving, quick/ly, still |  | Jerky, smooth |
| **Quantity** | A bit, all, lots, some, more | Another, any, many, no more, as much as | About, both, every, few, half, most, nearly, only, other | Each, enough, equal, fewest, less, much, none, part, plenty, several, unequal, whole.  |
| **Time** | Again, now | After, soon, today | Always, before, later, yesterday | Early, late, never, once, sometimes, tomorrow, twice |
| **Personal qualities** | Good, happy, naughty, sad | Bad, hungry, nice, pretty, silly | Cross, frightened, kind, thirsty | Clever, excited, pleased, unkind.  |