

How to Support Vocabulary Development



Why is having a strong vocabulary important?

When children are learning to read they first learn to decode (sound out) words. Then they attach those words to meaning. For example, if a child sounds out the word C-A-T, they then pair that word with what they know a cat to be. But if they sound out the word C-A-T and they don't know what a cat is- if they don't have the word cat in their vocabulary then C-A-T is meaningless and they don't understand what they are reading. This leads to reading comprehension difficulties and lowers reading confidence and enjoyment.

Also, many students without a strong vocabulary use vague and non-specific words such as "stuff", "thing", "guy", "over there", "that one" etc. It makes the listener have to work harder to understand what the child is talking about. Adults are pretty good at guessing what children mean when they don't use specific words, but it can be too much work for other children (friends).

It is quite natural for adults to label **objects**. Remember also to label: **actions** (crawl, stir, climb, measure, pounce) and **feelings** (nervous, overwhelmed, joyful, nauseous).

What can we do at home?

- ✓ Keep reading lots of books. But instead of only reading the words, point out the pictures and talk about them. Label objects, animals, feelings, actions etc.
- ✓ If you hear your child use a word like "stuff" or "thing", give them the more specific word that they could use instead.
- ✓ Use grocery flyers, magazines, catalogues etc.
 - Take turns circling things that you like. For example, "I like cantaloupe"
 - Cut out pictures and make a poster or scrap book with categories such as: farm animals, fruits, things that fly, things that are round, things that are orange, winter activities etc.
- ✓ Play games such as *Guess Who*, *HeadBantz* that require precise information to be shared.
- ✓ A Home Program is available upon request.

What can we do at school?

- ✓ Use themes in your classroom for seasons/social studies/science etc.
- ✓ PWIM- ask for support, as needed.
- ✓ SWAP- ask for support, as needed.

