

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Goal: VOCABULARY –School aged

The ability to understand and use wide range of words appropriate to the topic or conversation.

Vocabulary refers to the words a person understands and uses. The more words a child can understand and use the better they can learn in a range of settings. Vocabulary is one part of language that continues to develop all through life. It is related to the topic or task at hand. Try talking to an eight year old about dinosaurs or a twelve year old about computers and you will probably learn a few new words. Young children’s vocabulary starts with names of people and things, but grows to include action words and describing words. At school children need to know the vocabulary that goes with each topic or subject that they learn. Without the right vocabulary it is hard to learn new concepts and to understand and remember new information.



Activities to develop vocabulary in school aged children include:

1. Naming

Use clear picture cards, without written words to play naming games. Choose pictures in categories that are relevant to the child’s experience or topics they are learning at school.

- a) Lotto. Make two copies of a picture sheet (e.g. general food) and use these as the lotto boards for each player. Make another 2 copies and cut these into individual cards. Shuffle the cards and place them face down on the table. Each player then takes it in turns to choose a card, say the word and match it to their board. The first player to fill their board is the winner.
- b) Snap. Use the picture pairs from above to play snap. Divide the cards evenly among the players. Each player turns over one card at a time and says the word. If two pictures in a row match then the players must say “snap”. Whoever is first gets to keep the cards. The winner is the person who holds the most cards at the end of the game.
- c) Board games. Use the picture cards with any board game. After rolling the dice and moving their token, the player picks up a card and says the name of the object.
- d) Memory. Spread out each of the picture pairs on the table upside down. Players take it in turn to choose two cards. If they match the player can keep them. If not, put them back and the next player has a turn.

- e) Picture books. Picture books and children's encyclopaedias, with pictures in categories are ways of introducing new words into your child's vocabulary. Choose pages where your child can name most of the pictures and there are just a few new words.

2. Word finding

Ask your child to list as many items as he/she can think of within a certain category. Encourage self cuing rather than rely on adult help, although initial cueing may be necessary. To help with cueing try asking questions e.g. "What do you do with it", "What does it look like", or giving clues such as the first sound "It's a p....." or a sentence to finish "You write with a".

Categories can include: animals, clothes, toys, furniture, food, things in a certain room of the house, things at school, things in a certain type of shop, things of a certain shape or colour, things that start with a certain sound.

- a) Try incorporating word finding into everyday activities. For example after shopping ask "What did you see at the Butchers, Deli, etc".
- b) Play "I went to the shop and I bought"
Each person must repeat what has previously been bought before adding a new word to the list.
- c) After a walk try to remember all the things you saw. Collect things to bring home and keep, feather, stones, leaves, etc. to talk about
- d) Before you go somewhere or do something, try to think of all the things you might see. Make a list. When you come, home mark which ones did you see. Add ones you saw that you did not have on your list.



3. Referencing.

Referencing involves using specific vocabulary so that it is clear to the listener what you are talking about. Students with limited vocabulary often have difficulty with referencing. This means that they use "vague" words such as "it, he/she, thing, stuff" which makes it difficult to follow who or what they are talking about.

- a) Using puppets, animals or dolls discuss the actions they could do, i.e.: "we could make someone run". Get your child to decide WHO should run. Initially you will have to model the entire sentence, i.e.: "The dog, The dog is running". Once you have modelled it a few times, ask your child to make someone do something and tell you about it.
- b) Using male and female dolls, ask your child to tell you WHO wants to wear or do WHAT. You may need to model a couple of examples, i.e.: "The boy wants a hat".
- c) While looking at books or with pictures of actions, ask your child to describe what is happening, i.e.: "The cat is sleeping". Emphasis the who and what.
- d) Play hide and seek with a number of animals. Once they are found, your child must tell you what/who he/she found and where, i.e.: "The horse was under the chair".
- e) With a group of children, play a miming game of emotions or actions. People in the group must say what the person is feeling or doing, i.e.: "the boy is sad", "the girl is digging".

- f) When your child omits information about specific place or object names, ask, him/her questions, i.e.: "where is the ball?", "who went to the beach?".
- g) When reading your child stories, emphasises the who, what, where of the stories. Ask him/her questions about the story once you have finished. Model the answers to him/her if he/she has difficulty. "Who was under the bed?"
- h) Hide a favourite toy around the room and ask your child to find it. He/She must tell you exactly where he/she found it, i.e.: "the cat was on the chair". Ask him/her to hide the object also so you may model the "who" and "where" to him/her, e.g.: I found the **ball** on the **box**.
- i) Describing the day. When your child talks about things he/she has seen, done or made, encourage him/her to describe. "What did it look like?". "How big was it?", etc.
- j) During play using a farm yard, dolls house, garage, ask your child to talk about what is happening, i.e.: "The lady is going shopping", "The car is going home".
- k) Setting up house. Using a dolls house or small toys, your child may be the "boss" of a removal company and tell you where in the house the furniture is to go, i.e.: "Put the toilet in the bathroom", etc.
- l) Barrier games. With a screen between yourself and your child take it in turns to describe what you are creating on the other side of the screen, so the other person can copy, e.g.: drawing/colouring in pictures, building with blocks, setting up farm yard, placing pictures onto a scene etc.
Each person must have the same items on each side of the screen. If the instructions were correct the creation on each side of the screen should be the same when the screen is removed.
- m) In written work you can highlight any "vague" words and ask your child if they can think of a better word to use.

