



## Key principles to help your child learn words

- **Words are important**

An understanding and use of a wide vocabulary is needed to succeed at school and in life.

To progress with reading children need to understand the words they decode. To write well they need a wide and varied use of words. To understand all subjects including maths, science and social studies they need to understand the words that are used.

- **Home support for vocabulary makes a difference**

Children will learn words at school, but if they also come across these words at home they will learn them faster and better. Home and school working together gets to a place neither can on their own.

- **Have fun with words**

By playing with words children are also learning about words. We all know that children learn best when they are enjoying themselves. You do not need fancy games or gadgets to develop vocabulary; you just need a little conversation. Anyone can do that.

- **It is about talking as much as reading and writing**

Speaking and listening are the foundation skills for reading and writing. If your child has the word in their spoken vocabulary it is much easier to understand when they come across it in reading. Expose your child to spoken words as well as supporting their reading.

- **When talking about words, use comments more than questions**

To learn a word your child needs to hear it lots of times first. Use the target word in conversation so that your child hears you use it. If they use the target word, notice and say "Well done". Avoid just asking, "What does that mean?" because if they are still learning the word this will put them under pressure and may put them off.



## How to help your child learn words

### **Things to remember**

- Have fun with words.
- It is about talking as much as reading and writing.
- When talking about words, use comments more than questions.

### **Everyday things you can do to support vocabulary**

#### **Reading**

Reading to your child from an early age and continuing to support their reading is an effective way in which you can support vocabulary development. Once your child is an able reader, spend a little time talking about what he/she has been reading. This will help him/her to use the words he/she has read.

#### **Watching TV**

Set your child a task when watching TV. Can he/she come and tell you a word that he/she has heard? Can he/she tell you a word that he/she thinks you might not know? Ask him/her to describe a character from the show or compare two characters he/she has been watching. All of this involves vocabulary!

### **School activities to support home learning of vocabulary**

#### **Stickers**

Your child will sometimes get a 'word sticker' from school. This will have a word on it that he/she has been learning about. As he/she is still just learning it, it is best if you just use the word in sentences and talk about it rather than ask "What does that mean?"

#### **Word buddies**

Word buddies are people who children can ask about words that they do not know. If you are asked to be a word buddy your job is to tell your child a bit about what the word means, use the word in a sentence and, if you are not sure, then look it up in a dictionary together.

#### **Fridge Words**

Your child is going to be bringing home a list of 'Fridge Words'. These are words that he/she is learning about in school. These are to be displayed either on the fridge or a noticeboard. As with the sticker words, he/she is still just learning them so it is best if you just use the words in sentences and talk about them rather than ask "What does that mean?"

#### **Reading and talking**

When reading with your child take a moment to talk about the vocabulary. Examples include: "What words did you like?" "On this page can you find a word that means ...?" "Find a word that you don't know the meaning of." "Find a word that sounds funny." By building this into your reading routine you are developing your child's vocabulary.



## Word games to play at home

### *General fun games that support vocabulary*

#### *Simple games to start with*

These simpler games can be used with all ages but are suited to younger children in particular.

#### *Treasure hunt*

This is a great one for the journey to and from school. When outside go looking for things such as:

- Objects that could be described by a particular word such as 'gorgeous' or 'shrivelled'.
- Categories such as mini-beasts or things that need electricity, or things that are circular.
- Particular plants or insects such as 'vines' or 'ladybirds'.

Draw, write or take photographs of these objects if you can, but above all talk about them.

#### *Category call out*

On the bus or in the car, think of a category. You can choose any topic but here are some ideas for inspiration: 'living things', 'things with wheels', 'things with circles' or 'things made of metal'. Work as a team to see how many things you can see in a set time, such as two minutes. Next time see if you can beat your previous total.

#### *I went shopping*

This game is good for developing memory, so is good for adults too. One person starts by saying, "I went shopping and I bought a ..." (names a food item). The second player says, "I went shopping and I bought ..." and repeats the first player's item before adding their own. The third player continues, saying the first two items before adding their own. And so on. See how many you can remember. A variation of this game is: "I went on holiday and I packed ..."

#### *Word of the day*

Select a word for the day and write it somewhere everyone can see. This will work well with words that are sent home from school. Everyone then tries to use the word in a sentence as often as possible. The sentences must make sense and fit what you are talking about. They can't be random nonsense. See who can use the word the most times and maybe have a prize.

#### *Touch, taste and smell*

Talk about sensory experiences as they arise. When you smell something (good or bad) talk about words you can use to describe it and use words other than 'nice' or 'bad.' When you touch interesting things, can your child think of a word that describes how it feels? If they use words like 'good' or 'nice' challenge them to think of a more precise word such as 'rough' or 'soothing'.



## Word games to play at home

### *Slightly more challenging games*

#### ***I spy***

Play the traditional 'I spy' game. "I spy with my little eye something beginning with ... (letter)", or give it a twist by using categories or descriptive words like this: "something coloured red/blue ..." or something round/spiky/shiny/outside/inside that is ..." or "something that is big/beautiful/perfumed/growing/hot/noisy ..."

#### ***Alphabet game***

One for the bus or car. Start with calling out 'a'. Each player then tries to spot something that starts with an 'a.' When everyone has called out an item starting with 'a' you can move on to 'b' and so on through the alphabet. For a quicker game use the letters of someone's name.

#### ***Letter and category game***

Choose a category; it might be something like clothes, food or TV programmes. Then choose a letter. See how many words you can think of from that category that start with the target letter. For example, clothes starting with 's': scarf, socks, sweatshirt. Can you work your way through the whole alphabet?

#### ***What can it do?***

This is another game for journeys: one player calls out an object that he/she can see and the next person has to think of five things that it can do or can be done with it. For instance, 'tree:' climb, chop, grow, fall down and absorb carbon dioxide.

#### ***Big brain***

Big brain is a variation on 'I spy' but, rather than seeing something, you need to think of an object and the letter it starts with. Great for playing when you are waiting somewhere or when driving on dark evenings. "I think with my big brain something that is cold and starts with an 'i'." "Is it ice?" "No. Have another guess."

#### ***Describe it***

Write down on pieces of paper a range of words. They might be related to what your child is learning in school or any words that they are familiar with. Place all the words in a 'hat'. Each person takes a turn at taking out words from the hat. The challenge is to describe the word without using it at all.

#### ***Word associations***

One player starts by saying a word. The next player says a word that is related to the first word. It can be related in any way. If another player cannot see how the words are related he/she can challenge and the connection needs to be explained. Keep going until a word is repeated or a connection cannot be explained. Here's an example: Egypt – Mummy – Dad – beard – Santa Claus – Christmas – trees – leaves.

#### ***20 questions***

One person thinks of an object. Others try and guess what it is by asking questions. The original player can only answer yes, no or maybe. Give a clue if they are on the wrong track. Can they guess it in 20 questions?



## Help your child learn new words

Children need to understand words to understand what they are reading. Children also need words to understand science, maths and other subjects.

Children learn best if teachers and families work together.

If you speak other languages at home, talk about words in your own language. Play games, or translate English words into your own language.

At school we will be working hard to learn more words.



We will be sending new words and activities home to you. Try not to ask "What does it mean?" Instead talk about these words in sentences.

Have fun with words. Play the games that we send home, but also play any that you know. You can play word games in any language.

Words are for speaking as well as reading. Talk about words as well as reading and writing them.

If you want to know more about supporting your child to learn words, speak to your child's teacher.

A printable colour version is available on the website: [www.routledge.com/cw/speechmark](http://www.routledge.com/cw/speechmark)