Growing Words Through Talk: Boosting Vocabulary

Knowing many and interesting words helps children to understand and talk more precisely about their world. A broad vocabulary is also important for reading and writing. Growing vocabulary needs to begin from an early age and continues throughout life.

There are lots of ways you can help boost children’s vocabulary as part of their early literacy learning.

References

Department for Education, Speech Pathology, 2011.
Boosting vocabulary throughout the day

- **Listening to stories** promotes vocabulary learning as they contain interesting words children don’t typically hear in everyday conversation. Books introduce new words & opportunities to talk about what the words mean. Revisit the words later in the day & week, to connect the words to your child’s world.

- **Daily activities** such as in the supermarket or at lunch times supports rich conversations for new word learning, eg. “This paper is my receipt, it shows everything I bought and how much I paid. Each time I go to the shops I get a receipt.”

- **Pretend play** provides opportunities to hear and “pick up” new words, eg. while playing “doctor” introduce and explain words like patient, bandage.

Which words should I choose?

- **Select a few words.** These words might be simple everyday words like “plate” or “puppy” and include more interesting words or “wow words” to boost your child’s vocabulary. You know your child best, so choose words that suit their needs and interests.

- **Include:** naming (eg pouch), action (eg floating) and describing words (eg enormous).

How can I help my child learn words?

**Define:** Talk about the meaning of the word

- Say the word clearly and explain the meaning, eg ‘Enormous’ means really really big.”
- Describe what the word is and isn’t eg “‘Enormous’ is really really big. It’s not small like a baby, or even big like an adult. It’s really really big, like a tall building.”

**Do:** Show the meaning of the word

- Show what the word means and give real life examples. Find pictures that show the word meaning, use facial expressions, use gesture, change the way you say the word eg a tired voice for ‘weary’.

  - **Relating the word to existing knowledge & experiences:** Link new words and experiences to ones they already know, eg. “The truck is enormous! It’s a really, really big truck! Can you think of something really, really big that is enormous?”

**Revise:** Revisit the word many times

- Give the child hands on experiences using the new words. Revisit the word in different ways during the week. This will help strengthen their understanding and use of the word.

Teach it until they talk it back to you!