

Vocabulary

What is it?

With a solid vocabulary, a child understands and uses spoken and written words to communicate effectively.

Why is it important?

A broad vocabulary helps a child in all subject areas. The more words a child has been exposed to, the easier it is for him to figure them out when he sees them for the first time in print, and the easier it is for him to understand new concepts in class.

What can we do at home?

Read aloud - Continue to read aloud to your child even after he is able to read independently. Choose books above your child's level because they are likely to contain broader vocabulary. This way, you are actually teaching him new words and how they are used in context.

Preview words - Before reading to or with your child, scan through the book, choose two words that you think might be interesting or unfamiliar to your child. Tell your child what the words are and what they mean. As you read the book, have your child listen for those words.

Hot potato (version 1) - Play hot potato with synonyms. Choose a word, and then your child has to think of another word that means the same thing. Take turns until someone is stumped. For example, you may say, "Cold," and your child might say, "Freezing." Then you could say, "Chilly," and so on. Try the game again with antonyms.

Hot potato (version 2) - Play hot potato with prefixes or suffixes. The prefixes dis-, ex-, mis-, non-, pre-, re-, and un- are common ones. Common suffixes include -able/-ible, -ed, -er, -est, -ful, -ish, -less, -ly, -ment, and -ness.

Hot potato (version 3) - Play hot potato with categories. For younger children, the categories can be simple: pets, clothes, family members. For older children, the categories can be quite complex: The Revolutionary War, astronomy, math terms.

Word Collecting - Have each family member be on the look out for interesting words that they heard that day. At dinner or bedtime, have everyone share the word they collected and tell what they think it means. If the child shares an incorrect meaning, guide him to the correct meaning. Try to use some of the words in conversation.