

How to Build Your Child's Vocabulary Skills

Source: *Involving Parents in Their Child's Reading Development: A Guide for Teachers* by Bruce Johnson (2008).

Vocabulary is the name of words your child must know in order to listen, speak, read, and write effectively. The larger your child's vocabulary, the easier it is for her to make sense of the text she reads. She learns vocabulary in two ways: *indirectly* by hearing and seeing words as she listens, talks, and reads; and *directly* when teach her the meaning of certain words. Try these vocabulary activities at home:

Talk with your child. Through meaningful conversations with your child, you can teach him new words. As he talks with you often, he will hear you repeat words several times. He may also hear you use new and interesting words. Repeat any new words in a variety of contexts.

Read aloud to your child. Your child will learn the meaning of words from listening to you read to her. Choose books to read to her that are written at a higher level than her present reading vocabulary level. If she asks you what a word means, stop and talk about the word's meaning in connection to what she knows. Read stories aloud with drama and excitement! You can also use different voices for different characters in a story or use her name instead of a character's name. When you are done reading, talk with her about the book. Conversations about books will help her learn new words and concepts.

Build your child's interest in the world Children who know about the world are much better able to understand what they read and learn new words. Take your child on field trips in your community of places of interests. Read to him from informational (non-fiction) children's books. Help him

explore ideas and interests by looking up information on the Internet or visit your local public library.

Follow your child's personal choice of books. Your child will spend more time reading on his own if he can pick out his own reading material. You can help by selecting books for him that are based on his interests. If he is interested in space, you can visit your local public library to find books about space. Make sure his choices include information (nonfiction) books to help him learn new words.

Help with word attack strategies. Look for smaller words within words, beginnings and endings, common sounds, less common sounds like "c" making the /s/ sound, and context clues. When your child is trying to sound out an unfamiliar word, give her time to do so. Remind her to look closely at the first letter or letters of the word.

Play Stump the Reader. Ask your child to find a word you might not know and write it down. Model the word attack strategies above to determine the new word.

Play games with "sight words." Being able to recognize sight words automatically, will help your child with his reading. Find sight words in magazines. Make up a BINGO or TIC-TAC-TOE sight word game. Make two sets of sight words and play a matching game.