

Yet More Ideas to Strengthen Vocabulary

Research has shown that young children entering kindergarten with a strong vocabulary base will have an easier time gaining early literacy skills, such as reading and writing. When children have been exposed to numerous words early on, they have more of a bank of words of understanding to pull from when they begin to see those words in print. The words fire hydrant make sense when they read them in a book that shows a picture of a fire engine. The two items go hand in hand. So early on, be sure to present lots and lots of words to your young children. Here are some fun ideas to strengthen vocabulary.

Categories/Associations:

- Fill a box with 10 – 20 related categorical items (ex. animals, foods, vehicles, school supplies, writing implements, etc.) or gather pictures of like items
- Take items out one at a time and label or ask child to label – play with the items, explore
- Set three items out at a time – label and play with just these items (esp. good if child is distractible)
- Put like items together (ex. all blue cars in one pile or all boats in one pile or all animals with 4- legs in one pile, etc.) – discuss
- Go on a seek and find hunt looking for particular category items (let's find all the animals we can find around our school, let's find all the insects)
- Put three of the same item and one odd item in a line – ask which one doesn't belong with the others and discuss why it is odd – or why the others go together (whichever route the child takes to explain, be sure to add the rest of the information – ex. child says 'cuz these are all animals', you add, 'yes, and this one is a kind of food!')
- Connect particular items to appropriate location of use, ex. plane to the sky, cow to a barn, banana to a tree, arm to a body, fork to a kitchen, etc.

Descriptions

- Place 3 – 5 items in a bag and have the child reach in to get an item. Without looking, ask the child to describe what they feel – another person guesses
- Look at pictures in books (I Spy books are great for this) – describe an item pictured or have child describe – other person needs to guess

Functions

- Gather functional items or picture of functional items and have the child show functionality and discuss (ex. hand child a toothbrush and ask to show what to do on a nearby doll; give a hairbrush and let her show what to do; give a key and a lock; ball, bar of soap, car, cup, spoon, blanket, shoe, etc.)
- Try to tease or set an odd situation (ex. pretend to brush the doll's hair with a shoe – giggle and say, *uh-oh, what's wrong?*)
- Have a picture or actual need for a tool (ex. have a partially cut piece of paper

and ask what is needed to complete the job; have a locked box with something inside, ask how to get the box open; have a dirty baby and ask what is needed to clean the baby, etc.)

Similarities/Differences

- Gather items or pictures and set two items or pictures in front of the child. Discuss the similarities and differences – taking turns giving a similarity and a difference. Keep track of how many differences and similarities are present.
- Look around the room for similarities and differences between two items or pictures
- Go on a hunt to find two similar items or pictures
- Discuss similarities and differences between books, stories, movies, songs, people, etc.

Synonyms/Antonyms

- Gather actual items to create antonyms and synonyms – comparisons (ex. big vs. little pencil; thick vs. thin rope; rough vs. smooth rock; etc.)
- Go on a hike to find synonyms and antonyms – hot vs. cold water, high vs. low leaves, hard vs. soft dirt, etc.
- Place objects in opposite and same positions (ex. up vs. down, in vs. out, over vs. under, etc.)

Definitions

- Look in a dictionary and randomly choose a word to define (try anything – even take a chance defining 'the' and 'a' and 'of' – all will help!)
- Look in a fiction book or curriculum related book and randomly choose a word to define
- Create a deck of cards of chosen words to define and take turns defining the words on the cards
- Play word guess games – define words, then look the actual words up in the dictionary
- Define a word each time you visit together with the child – new word each time – review old words learned – attempt to put the words into sentences for added understanding
- Always put newly learned words into sentences for better understanding

Multiple Meaning Words

- Make a deck of word cards for child to present oral meanings to the words – when can give more than 2 meanings, give extra points (ex. rock = stone = move back and forth = type of music = someone's name)
- Ask child to give a sentence for each word definition provided

Commercial Word Games Available: Password (synonyms/antonyms), Scattergories (categories), Clue (deductive logic), Mystery Garden (descriptions, 20 questions), Guess Who (problem solving + descriptions), TriBond (for older children– similarities/differences, finding connections), Pictionary (words and picture representations), Boggle (finding words in mixed letters), Scrabble (creating words, spelling), Word Madness (spelling), UpWords (spelling)

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