



Early Vocabulary and Concepts

Many times I meet a parent for a first time who is so excited to tell me that their two-year old child is reciting the alphabet, can count to twenty, and is naming colors. Though I smile at the pride on this parent's face, I cringe inside. Yes, it is important that young children know these early concepts, but if they know these concepts without other basic functional communication vocabulary first, I worry. And I worry a lot. If when I meet the child, she looks away from me instead of responding to my 'hi'. When they go directly to their alphabet book and start reciting the letters, yet will not soon engage with me to pretend to feed a doll, I begin to worry. I want children engaged with me and others, showing me what they've learned through play activities, not recitation.

For a young 2-3 year old child, it is important to make the alphabet, colors, and numbers available - I do not refute this. However, these are truly abstract and meaningless words and concepts to a young child.

Let's look at colors for example. If every time you present your child a red apple, you say 'red', your child will associate 'red' with the apple and begin to use that word. However, if your child comes to you and says 'red' out of the blue, you will be in the dark. Red can represent many many things. However, if you had initially focused on the word 'apple' instead, your child will associate this word with the food item, and you will know immediately what your child wants when he approaches saying 'apple'. Your child and you will be much happier!

Recognizing words within your child's early communication efforts is important. Words are defined as:

- Having a vowel
- A single production followed by a pause
- Recurring reference to a person, object, or situation
- Used in conversation

Typical first words relate to usefulness (ex. what will get their needs met best), easy sounds in the word (ex. dada vs. father), and environment (what is heard most often in the child's early life circumstances, such as pet or sibling names). Listen carefully as you might miss words such as *this*, *that*, *there* and

here. They often slip by unnoticed because they carry no emotional meaning, but they are very useful!

Size and quantity concepts, like *big, little, small, huge, tiny, more, most, many* can be physically represented and are easy early vocabulary concepts.

Prepositions are easy early concepts to teach as they are concrete terms you can readily represent. They are also fairly easy to produce because they often start with a vowel. Examples: *in, out, on, off, up, down, here, there, over, under, inside, outside*. Here are some ideas to foster early prepositions as you play or within daily life circumstances:

- Place a bead into a can and say *in*.
- Take the bead out of the can and say *out*.
- When you go outside, say *out* or *outside*.
- When you come inside, say *in* or *inside*.
- When your child reaches up to you to be picked up, say *up*.
- When your child wants to get down from your arms or from her chair, say *down*.
- When you or your child turn the lights on, say *on*.
- When you or your child turn the lights off, say *off*.
- When the dog is lying under the table, say *under* and point to the dog.
- Point up to the sky and say *up*.
- Point to Daddy and ask, *where's Daddy? He's there. There*.
- Point to the dog and say *come here. Here*.

Red

Blue

Vs.

Apple

Sky