



Teach reading effectively in every classroom, every day

### **Activities to develop vocabulary**

Vocabulary refers to the words children need to know to understand what they hear and read, and to communicate. Vocabulary is the most powerful predictor of reading comprehension. Knowing what words mean is essential if your child is to understand what they have read.

When it comes to vocabulary acquisition, the early years are critical. There is evidence that improving vocabulary before age six is very highly associated with literacy success in late primary school and even into mid secondary school.

Adults play a significant role in the development of a child's vocabulary. Through everyday conversation and by reading to children, parents and caregivers can introduce a variety of new words.

Children learn new words when they: hear a word repeatedly; hear words spoken by the important people in their lives; and hear words in a meaningful context – during conversation at dinner, in the car, while playing and while reading.

Young children benefit from exposure to lots of words. As children grow, they benefit from hearing a variety of sophisticated words, and having those words explained to them.

Below are some simple and effective ideas for developing your child's vocabulary.

#### **When introducing new words to your child, keep the following hints in mind:**

- First, provide a simple, child-friendly definition for the new word: "Enormous means that something is really, really big."
- Second, provide a simple, child-friendly example that makes sense within their daily life: "Remember that really big watermelon we got at the fruit shop? That was an enormous watermelon!"
- Third, encourage your child to give their own example: "What enormous thing can you think of? Can you think of something really big that you saw today? That's right! The bulldozer near the park was enormous! Those tires were huge."

- Lastly, keep your new words active within your house. Over the following days and weeks, use each new vocabulary word in conversation.

**Research has shown the importance of repetition when developing vocabulary. Children must engage with a word several times in different contexts before it is learnt.**

- The more you read to your child, the larger vocabulary they will develop. Read stories and then talk about them. Ask, “What was that story about?” or “Did you like that character? Why?”
- Read books that will extend your child’s vocabulary, and take time to talk about new words. Choose books that have some, but not too many, new words.

**During each of the following activities, try to introduce new words:**

- At mealtimes, talk about the food you’re preparing, what you’re doing to it, how it tastes and what it looks like.
- Talk about objects outside the house when on an outing – for example, the rustling of leaves, or the sounds of the birds, or traffic.
- Talk about a game your child is playing – ask them to explain what just happened.
- Talk about the recent past. Ask your child to tell you something they enjoyed doing that week.
- Tell your child stories about when you were younger, or about your family’s past.
- Talk about the future. Tell your child what you’re going to do on the next day or on the weekend, or ask her to tell you what she needs to do before she goes to bed.
- Encourage children to recognise when they have encountered new words.
- Every day, choose a new ‘word of the day’ and attempt to use it in different contexts as many times as possible.
- Check for your child’s understanding of words meaning by asking targeted questions.

These activities were collated from the following sources:

Reading Rockets – [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)

Raising Children Network – [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

UK Department for Education – [www.education.co.uk](http://www.education.co.uk)

The Hanen Centre – [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)