How to support:

Your child's understanding of new vocabulary

What is vocabulary?

Vocabulary refers to all the words someone knows and/or uses across their language(s) i.e. words that someone understands and words that they use. We need to understand a word before we can use it in the right way.

Each person's vocabulary is made up of lots of different types of words. Some examples include; nouns (naming words for people, places, things), verbs (action words), adverbs, adjectives (describing words) etc.

It is also helpful to group vocabulary into categories/topics. When we learn new words, we naturally file them in our brains in different ways. One of these ways is in categories. This is so that we can retrieve or find them when we need them e.g. vocabulary related to transport, food, family, clothes etc.

Children with language difficulties often have trouble learning, storing, and retrieving/finding vocabulary.

Strategies

- The best way to learn new vocabulary is to start with words for the things around us – what we see, do, hear everyday and build from there.
- Children are going to be more likely to understand and learn a word if it is relevant to their day-to-day life.
- Use visual support - Makaton signs or gesture, objects, photographs, symbols.
- Use a multisensory approach i.e. different sensory elements throughout activities where possible – look, feel, listen, smell etc.
- Generalise vocabulary to different contexts across the child's life and routines e.g. if you are targeting transport vocabulary – look at books about transport, watch videos about transport, label transport items in the playground or when you are out and about, talk about transport toys when you're playing, etc.
- Inform parents/carers of what vocabulary you're targeting so that they can focus on labelling the words at home in day-to-day life too.
- Keep a list of words or vocabulary that is "new" and talk about/revisit these new words regularly across the week.

Activities

Toys

Use toy items to focus on the vocabulary you are targeting e.g. If you are targeting simple verbs, set up a game where you use toy characters to act out different actions such as; jumping, running, sleeping, eating. If you are targeting food vocabulary, use pretend food to have a picnic or to do some cooking etc. Label items/actions in your play for the child to hear the words lots.

Simon Says

Use this game to target verb vocabulary and provide instructions for the children to follow e.g. touch, jump, clap, nod, blink, dance, hop, stomp.

Books

Choose a book to target specific vocabulary you are focusing on. When looking through books together, talk about what is happening on each page. Emphasize the words you are focusing on e.g. transport vocabulary, verbs, food items etc.

Categorising

Lay out the two main category pictures in front of your child e.g. animals and transport. Put pictures or objects/toy items into a feely bag. Children take it in turns to take one out and choose the category it belongs to. You may wish to use a base picture for your child to put these items on as visual support, e.g. a farm for animals and a garage for transport items.

- Talk about what makes the items similar, e.g. the animals have eyes and noses, and the transport items have wheels.
- You can do this with broad categories (i.e. two groups/categories that are quite different) and you can make it more difficult and play with narrower categories (i.e. two groups/categories that are more closely related) e.g. the sea for sea animals and the farm for farm animals, transport that goes on the road and transport that goes in the sky.
- Use familiar items, e.g. food (fruit vs. vegetables) clothes (winter vs. summer) transport (sky vs. land) etc.
- Build up to asking the child to label the category items belong to, e.g. “a dog, cat and fish are all…”
- Make the game harder by playing with 4 categories at a time

Things that go together

Spread pairs of pictures or pairs of objects and ask the child to find the things that “go together” e.g. a pencil and eraser, a spoon and fork etc. If in a small group, children can take it in turns to find pairs.