BELS Barnet Education & Learning Service

NHS Whittington Health NHS Trust

How to develop:

Your child's use 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. Tell the child what you are doing and encourage the child to tell you what they are doing in their play.

Simon Says
Use this game to target verb vocabulary e.g. touch, jump, clap, nod, blink, dance, hop, stamp. Children can take it in turns to give an instruction to their peers.

Books
Choose a book to target specific vocabulary you are focusing on. When looking through books together, children to take it in turns to describe what they can see/what is happening on each page. Ask questions that encourages the child to use the vocabulary you are focusing on e.g. to label food items they can see etc.

Naming game
In a small group, throw a ball/bean bag around the circle to pass the turn and ask each person to name 3 items from a category when its their turn e.g. 3 colours, 3 farm animals, 3 lunch foods, 3 sports etc. You can't repeat what your friends have said so the game gets harder as it goes along. Write down all the words for each category that the group think of.

What am I?
Put pictures/items into a feely bag. Children take it in turns to take one out, hiding it from their peers. The child must give 3 pieces of information so that their peers can guess what the item/picture is e.g. "I'm green", "I'm a fruit", "I'm crunchy".

- You can play this game to target different vocabulary groups e.g. fruit, transport, jobs (fireman, doctor, teacher etc) .

Where am I?
Put pictures into a feely bag. Children take it in turns to take one out, hiding it from their peers. The child must give 3 pieces of information so that their peers can guess the place they are describing e.g. "I can see an oven, a fridge and a sink".

I Spy
Play "I spy" where the children take it in turns to describe what they can see (either around the room, from a selection of object/pictures etc) and their peers must guess e.g. "I spy some weather that is wet", "I spy a building with books in it".

Finding the right word

If the child has difficulty finding the right word for something help them to see if they can retrieve it.

- Think about the category/the group the item fits in e.g. a fruit.
- Describe the item – shape, colour, size, texture e.g. green, circular, crunchy.
- Think about where you usually find the item e.g. in the kitchen, in the supermarket, in my lunchbox.
- Think about the sound the word starts with e.g. “a” or “p”.
- See if the child can draw the item.
- Give the child some time.
- If you know the word the child is thinking of and the above prompts haven’t helped them, offer them a choice of 2 – “are you thinking of an apple or pear?”