



## ***WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?***



### **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO DEVELOPING VOCABULARY**

Many children with language impairment understand and use fewer words than other children their age, i.e. they have a limited vocabulary. An adequate vocabulary is necessary to express one's ideas fully and therefore the development of vocabulary is an important language goal. Here are some general ideas about vocabulary learning and some activities that you can do with your child.

1. Vocabulary is best learned in meaningful contexts and when the object is present.
2. Vocabulary involves **more than the names of objects**. It also includes action words, descriptive words, location words, etc.
3. New vocabulary should be introduced alone or in simple sentences, with the vocabulary items stressed using your voice.
4. There are developmental patterns to vocabulary acquisition and these should be adhered to. For example, general terms are learned before specific items, i.e. "big" is learned before "tall" or "wide", and the more abstract the term the more difficult it is to acquire and talk about. As well, things the child can act on are learned early.
5. Children must understand underlying concepts before a new word can have meaning. For example, a child must know how to match and sort items by colour before he can be expected to learn the colour label.
6. Children's word meanings are refined over time and at first may not reflect the standard adult meaning.
7. Children will acquire words which are both of interest and useful to them, initially.

*This resource has been provided as part of your child's Speech Therapy service plan. Please contact the therapist if you have any questions.*

## How to Work on Vocabulary

### 1. Daily Routines

Common words can be taught using daily routines, both at home or in the day care/nursery school setting. For example, when it is time to go outside it is a good opportunity to teach words associated with dressing, e.g. "Let's pull on your sweater", "push your foot in the boot", "zip the zipper". Model these words in context as often as possible. Emphasize the key words with your voice.

### 2. Theme Approach

Teach new words and improve understanding and use of more familiar words by following the themes being used in the daycare/nursery school program. Using themes will ensure that the child encounters the words in several contexts outside of the specific times you are trying to teach him the words.

This will also provide the child with opportunities to use the words in the classroom with both the teachers and other children. When a child is more familiar with theme words he/she will be better able to follow the activities and participate more verbally, e.g. answer questions.

- 1) Before the theme week begins, write out all the possible vocabulary words that could be encountered. Include names of objects, action words, descriptive words, etc. Familiarize the child with these words using relevant story books, games, pretend play, etc. For example:

Theme: vegetable

Sample word list: carrots, crunchy, orange, root, peel, taste, salad

Read a story about a farmer or Peter Rabbit ; play a guessing game where you describe various vegetable and have the child guess what they are (reverse roles for more familiar vegetable). Involve the child in an activity where you make salad.

*This resource has been provided as part of your child's Speech Therapy service plan. Please contact the therapist if you have any questions.*

- 2) During the theme week, continue above. Also, model the targeted word wherever it is appropriate during the day. For example at lunch, talk about the vegetables being eaten. Frequent repetition of new words in context is crucial.
- 3) To encourage the use of new words, try to set up situations during the day where their use is required, i.e. if “carrot” is a target word, forget to give it to the child and wait / encourage asking for it. “What do you want? Ca...” or “Do you want a carrot or an onion?”
- 4) At the end of the theme period, review words. Keep log of words to preview periodically or when the opportunity arises. For example, if your child tells you about what was for dinner, encourage discussion about the vegetable eaten.
- 5) Ensure that your child’s family is aware of the theme being targeted so that they can reinforce the vocabulary too.
- 6) Play games with the vocabulary pictures from your therapist. Make 2 copies of the pictures and play matching games, or play BINGO
- 7) Glue the pictures in a scrapbook and then you will have a special book to read together.

The best resource for vocabulary are old grocery flyers and catalogues. You can play:

- 1) shopping games ; make a picture shopping list by cutting and gluing items on a card, then find them in your kitchen
- 2) make a poster of a house and cutout furniture to glue in the rooms
- 3) cut out a boy and a girl, then sort out their paper clothes and toys

