

What are Basic Concepts?

Basic concepts are the words we use to describe our world. Basic concept words are organized in categories such as **colour**, **number** (quantity), **position** and **time**. In typical children, they are learned through play and everyday activities. As with all vocabulary, basic concepts are understood first (receptive language) and *then* used by the child (expressive language).

Typical Concept Development

By Age	Concepts Acquired
3	Spatial terms: <i>in, on, under, behind</i>
3 ½	Basic colour words
4	Basic shape words: <i>square, circle, triangle</i> Basic size words: <i>big, small</i>
4 – 5	Numbers, Counting, Letters and Sounds are emerging

If your child is having difficulty understanding of basic concepts...

You can help by:

Colour

Matching: Find items of clothing that match e.g. socks. Sort items by colour (e.g. put all the red shirts in this pile; put all the blue towels in this pile, etc.)

Choosing: Ask questions like “ Do you want to wear your green shirt or your yellow shirt?”
“Would you like the blue cup or the purple cup?”

Labelling: Talk about the colour of objects in the environment. Occasionally ask your child colour questions such as: What colour is his hat? What colour are you painting your flower? What colour is our new car?

Numbers/ quantity: Numbers are typically learned from smallest to largest. Children usually recognize numbers of objects (point to two cups) and identify groups that have the same number (two cats, two dogs, two sheep) before they can count items expressively. **Quantity** words such as *more* and *less* come later and may be difficult even when the child has learned to count accurately.

Use number words in everyday communication: Here’s *one* cookie. I see *one* cat. There’s only *one* sandwich left. I have *one* nose and *two* eyes, *two* hands, *two* feet. I found *one* sock but I need *two*.

Count items: Play counting games e.g. Use a counting picture book. One person counts one item and the other counts another item. Identify which group has “more” items. Engage your child in everyday activities in which counting is needed. For example:

- set the table and count the correct number of spoons, plates, forks, etc.;
- count out the number of cups, teaspoons etc. that are needed when baking.

Size: Size concepts include: *big/little, short/long, tall/short, thin/fat, thick/thin, narrow/wide*. Size is a relative concept (as is quantity e.g. *more/less*). For example, an elephant may be described as *big* next to a mouse, but *little* next to a brontosaurus.

Use size words in daily situations: Point out *big* boxes and *little* boxes in the cereal aisle while grocery shopping; have your child pick a *long* banana instead of a *short* banana for the lunch kit; draw a *thick* line instead of a *thin* line when drawing a picture. The more examples of common usage the child hears, the more likely he is to retain (learn) the vocabulary.

Point out similar words: For instance, if a child sees an individual who is 6 ft. 7 in. and comments that he is *big*, tell him that we could also call him *tall*.

Space/Position: Space/Position Concepts include *up/down, in/out, on/off, bottom/top, over/under, far/near, in back (behind)/ in front, beside (next to), above/below, beginning/end, and first/last*.

Play games:

- Simon Says - directions could include statements like “Put your hand *on* your head; stand *behind* a chair; put your paper *under* your book”, etc.
- I Spy- give clues like I Spy something that is *behind* you.
- Hide and Seek - the person who is “it” ask questions that must be answered if the guess is correct e.g. Are you *under* the blanket?

Encourage opposites: If its not up then it must be _____?

Time: Time is the most abstract of basic concepts and is usually the last learned. Time words include *first, next, last, soon, later, before* and *after* as well as *today, tonight, last night, yesterday, tomorrow* and *tomorrow night*.

Use visual supports: When you are talking about time concepts you can use a **calendar** or **clock** to help make the concepts easier to understand. Don’t worry about teaching your child to tell time or learn the days of the week at first. You can point out *today* on the calendar and ask how many sleeps until tomorrow - explain that each square represents one day. You can count the number of sleeps (squares on the calendar) until a special event. Use phrases like *the day after tomorrow* when you are down to two more sleeps (days). A **picture schedule** of the events in a day can help teach your child concepts like *later, after lunch, or afternoon/ morning/ evening*. Alert them to

the movement of the hands on a clock to help them understand the passage of time e.g. when the little hand gets to the 7 it will be time to _____.

Remember that actions, pictures, drawings and real life examples are all great ways to teach basic concepts.

Talk to your child's teacher or Speech-Language Pathologist for more ideas to help him at home during everyday activities.

References

Paul, Rhea in Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence, Moseby Elsevier Pub., 2007)

Yeatts, Rebecca D. (1995) Developing Basic Concepts, Communication Skill Builders, Cat. #3073

