

## Building Vocabulary: Learning New Words

### Did you know...

- Children begin first grade with a 6000 word vocabulary?
- Students usually learn 3000 words a year by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade?
- Only 400 words a year are directly taught by teachers?
- Vocabulary knowledge is one of the 5 essential components of reading?

Learning all the words in English can be overwhelming. Children who understand fewer words than average may have language, literacy or learning disabilities. Some children with poor vocabularies seem to have difficulty remembering new words. Early hearing problems can also cause poor vocabulary.

### How can you help?

If your child has poorer vocabulary knowledge than other children his age, the following ideas may help:

- **Provide a language rich environment.** Read to your child every day. Point out words he might not yet know. Talk about what the word means and use it in another sentence. Get him to repeat the word after you. Try to use the word again in another sentence during the day. Children learn words based on their experiences. Talk about those experiences with your child to increase his vocabulary. Praise him when he tries to use a new or interesting word, even if he doesn't quite "get it right".
- **Foster Word Consciousness.** Word play is a great way to encourage a child's interest in learning new words. Draw your child's attention to homophones (words that sound alike but have different meanings e.g. pear and pair) and homographs (words that have more than one meaning e.g. bat). Tell jokes that use puns. Use books that allow children to be entertained by funny words but also raise interest in the words that are read e.g. *The King Who Rained* or *A Chocolate Moose for Dinner* by Fred Gwynn. For slightly older students *Thank you, Amelia Bedelia* and *Come Back, Amelia Bedelia* show how misunderstandings can occur through language use. For intermediate students *The Phantom Tollbooth* and *Frindle* provide clear information on word use and word play in stories with entertaining plots. The Songs for Teaching website

(<http://www.songsforteaching.com/avni/alliterativebooks.htm> ) has an extensive list of books that promote alliteration, rhyming and word play.

- **Teach word-learning strategies.** Teach your child to make guesses about what a new word might mean by using context e.g. What do you think scampered means in the sentence “The rabbit scampered away from the dog.” Help your child use his knowledge of parts of words to make sense of a new word e.g. unspoiled... the “un” prefix usually means not. For older students, teach them how to use a dictionary or an online thesaurus. Have him record new words in a book so he can find them and use them in his conversation or writing.

## References

Beck, Isabel; McKeown, Margaret; and Kucan, Linda Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition The Guilford Press, 2013

