

Language development: activities for developing vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the variety, or range, of words a person uses.

If your child has a wide and varied vocabulary, it will help them to understand and describe their experiences, thoughts and ideas.

Vocabulary also plays an important role in learning to read.

Below are a number of activities that can be used to help your child develop their vocabulary around nouns (object/naming words) and verbs (action words).



Nouns (objects/naming words)

Naming games

Play naming games at home, at the playground or in the car. Ask your child to list as many items as they can think of in a certain category such as:

- Animals at the zoo
- Toys they play with
- Clothes they wear
- Things in the classroom
- Things of a certain shape or colour
- Things they see in the deli, butcher, supermarket or greengrocer

Naming familiar objects

Play naming games using pictures of common objects (eg pictures cut from newspapers, magazines, store catalogues or the internet).

You might like to go on outings with your child and take photos of objects you find, so that your child can have photos of objects they have actually seen to connect to new words.

If your child is able to take some photos themselves, this is likely to increase their interest in the activity even more.

“Go Fish”

Use a game of “Go Fish” to give your child opportunities to practise using a range of nouns (or verbs).

Make a fishing rod out of a length of dowel and a piece of string with a small magnet on the end. Make ‘fish’ by attaching paper clips to noun picture cards. Take turns using the fishing rod to fish for cards (from a bucket, box or off the floor).

When either of you ‘catches’ a card, say the word for your child first, then get them to repeat it after you.

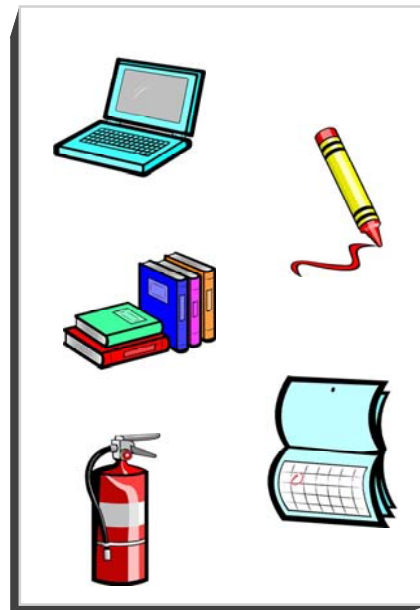
Posting game

Paste noun or verb pictures onto cardboard rectangles (cut from a cereal box or similar) and play a posting game. Make a post box out of another cardboard box and use the pictures as ‘letters’ to post — again, say the word for your child first, then ask your child to repeat it. Once your child has repeated a word, they can post the card.

Collage

Cut out pictures from magazines or catalogues to make a collage, naming the objects or actions. Sort the pictures by category and group the things that go together. For example:

- Things we wear, eat or play with
- Things that go in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, lounge room or laundry
- Things that go on the road, in the water or in the sky (transport)
- Things that live on a farm, in a zoo, in water, in trees (animals)
- Things at school or home



Verbs (action words)

Scrapbooks

Cut out pictures from magazines or catalogues to make a collage or a scrapbook, naming the objects/actions. Sort pictures by category and group the things that go together. For example:

- Things we do at the playground eg swing, hop, run, walk or balance
- Things we do at kindy or school eg read, write, colour, paint or play
- Things we do in the kitchen eg cook, wash, mix, pour, wipe



Play 'Simon Says' using a range of actions

“Simon says...clap your hands/stamp your feet/jump/wiggle/squirm/roll...”

You may need to demonstrate the action you want your child to do.

If you demonstrate the action, make sure your child copies you. Your child is more likely to remember the word because they will link it to the action they performed.

Singing the action words

Add new action words into songs with a familiar tune. For example, if you were teaching the word 'wiggle', you might sing “If you're happy and you know it...wiggle your fingers...” and perform the action as you sing.

Some children are encouraged by songs and will join in more easily in activities that involve music and actions.

Using new words for everyday activities

Use a range of different verbs (action words) when talking to your child during everyday experiences. For example:

- Cooking – stirring, sprinkling, shaking, rolling, pouring
- Gardening – digging, clipping, planting, watering
- Bath time – splashing, washing, scrubbing, pouring
- Packing up/cleaning – wiping, finding, folding, packing, stacking
- At the playground – running, hopping, sliding, swinging, climbing

Reading stories

Read stories that involve lots of verbs (action words). As you read the stories with your child, emphasise the verbs and act them out.

Making your own stories

Make books (for example using exercise books) for your child that involve photos of your child performing different actions.

Each page could have a short sentence that describes the action (eg “Sarah is skipping.”).

Children are often more interested in activities that use their own experiences, particularly when photos of them doing something are involved.

