

## Speech and Language Therapy Service for Children, Barking and Dagenham

### Supporting Your Child's Vocabulary Development

'Vocabulary' refers to the words we understand and use. These include names of things (nouns), action words (verbs), and describing words (adjectives).

#### Advice for helping develop your child's vocabulary

- Use real objects when teaching new vocabulary so that your child can touch, feel, hear, smell and handle them. This way, your child can use their five senses to help them learn and remember new vocabulary. Pictures or photographs can also be used.
- Think about all types of words, not just the names of things (nouns). You can also work on action words (e.g. throw, fall), describing words (e.g. sharp, fluffy), location words (e.g. under, behind), and feelings words (e.g. shocked, angry).
- Talk about new vocabulary in as many situations as possible. For example, when out shopping, in the garden, in the street etc. New vocabulary is best taught as it arises during the day. In this way, the natural context is available and it is more meaningful to your child.
- When new vocabulary is introduced, a child will need to hear it used many times before they will feel confident enough to use it. They are also more likely to remember it if they hear it used within a sentence, as this gives the word more meaning.
- Bring your child's attention to sounds and letters in words. Talk about the first sound of a word (e.g. 'photo' starts with the 'ffffff' sound), whether a word is long or short (e.g. long – caterpillar), how many parts/syllables it has (e.g. com-pu-ter has three parts), and what else it rhymes with (e.g. *ball* rhymes with *tall* and *fall*).
- You could pick a vocabulary category every week and try to use as much vocabulary from that category as possible. For example, *furniture* – talk about all the furniture in the house and play games using this vocabulary (see below for activities).
- Give your child new experiences. The more children experience, the more words they are exposed to, and the greater their vocabulary. For example, when you take your child to the seaside/farm/park/museum, talk about all the things you see and what you are doing.
- Boosting a child's vocabulary also helps to boost their early literacy skills – i.e. reading and writing. Read books regularly with your child– reading builds vocabulary. When you read with your child, explain what new words mean, have a conversation about these words, and look at the pictures. Reading books exposes your child to vocabulary that they may not otherwise come across in their day to day lives (e.g. outer space, different parts of the world, nature, superheroes etc.).
- Encourage your child to 'talk around' the word if they can't think of a certain word. For example, 'Can you tell me a bit more about it?' 'What's it for?' 'Where do you find it?' Even if your child is unable to think of the word, talking about it may give you enough information to guess what they are aiming for. This will help to increase your child's success in remembering words and attempting to use them. This will in turn increase their confidence.
- Support your child to use a vocabulary book. This is simply a notebook where they can write down new words that they learn at school, the meanings of these words, and even draw pictures to represent these words. Your child can look back at the words in this book.
- Find out what topics your child is covering at school. Regularly ask your child's teacher or teaching assistant about new vocabulary they are learning at school so you can also support this at home.

#### Activities for helping develop your child's vocabulary

**Twenty questions:** Play this game in a pair or a group – one person picks a card and the others have to guess what is on the card. Using pictures of common items (e.g. objects and animals); one person picks a card, keeping the picture hidden. The others ask specific questions in order to correctly guess what it is (e.g. Is it an animal? Does it have four legs? Does it live on a farm?). The guessers have 20 questions in total.

**Guess what/who I am:** Again, use picture cards. Take turns to choose a card, keeping the picture hidden. Each person has to describe the object to the group giving as much information as possible. For example, for the word “bed” you could say it’s *furniture* (category), *found in the bedroom* (location), *you sleep on it* (function), *is made of wood, has four legs* (appearance), *has one syllable*, and *begins with a ‘b’* etc. The others have to guess what the object is.

**Which category?:** Encourage your child to sort items or pictures into their categories/groups, e.g. transport, animals, food, clothes, buildings, etc. When your child is confident at this, each category can be divided up even more, e.g. transport - road/water/air, clothes - hot/cold weather; furniture – bedroom/kitchen; animals – farm/sea/jungle etc.

**How many can you name?:** Pick a category (e.g. birds). Take it in turns name one item from that category (e.g. child – flamingo; mum - pigeon). Keep going until someone can’t think of another.

**Odd one out:** Place three pictures in front of your child. Two pictures should be from the same category (e.g. animals – *cat, cow*) and one picture should be from a different category (e.g. food – *orange*). Ask your child to show you the picture that is different (i.e. the odd one out). If your child has difficulty with this, you can show/explain this to them (e.g. “The orange is different because it’s a food, not an animal. The cat is an animal and the cow is an animal”).

**“I went to the shop and I bought...”:** Play this game in a pair or a group. Take turns to say what you bought at the shop using the phrase “I went to the shop and I bought...”. Each person in turn will have to name the items already said and add a new item. Keep going for as long as you can. You can pick different categories or even change the starter phrase (e.g. “I went to the zoo and I saw...”). You could also pick a letter and ‘buy’ things starting with that letter (e.g. /p/ - pepper, pineapple, paper).

**Word Wise quickie:** Another quick activity to help your child remember and learn new words is to ask the following three quick questions: 1. Think of a meaning (e.g. for the word ‘sunglasses’ – “Something that protects your eyes from the sun”). 2. Think of a sound (e.g. “begins with ‘sssss’”). 3. Think of a sentence (e.g. “I wore my sunglasses when I went to the beach”).

**I spy:** Use adjectives to describe something you ‘spy’. For example, “I spy with my little eye something that’s soft”; “I spy with my little eye something that’s green”. The other person has to guess the object that has been described.

**Things that go together:** Find pictures/objects of things at home that go together such as ‘knife and fork’ or ‘hat and gloves’. Play a pairs game, helping your child to think of the items that might go together.

**Think of actions:** Pick an object. Talk about the actions you can do with the object. Encourage your child to think of more actions. For example, Carrot: *eat, chop, boil, peel, crunch*; Rope: *pull, cut, knot, tie, wrap*.