

# Developing Vocabulary:

## For young children

Vocabulary is important in both spoken and written forms. It impacts on a child's ability to communicate their ideas effectively and develop their reading skills.

For children with severe difficulties in developing their spoken language you may need to consider other forms of visual support such as commenting boards and communication books to provide alternative ways for them to communicate either alongside or in place of spoken language.

If a child has gaps in their spoken vocabulary it is important to think about what vocabulary is most important for them on a day to day basis. For children with very limited vocabulary you might need to focus on basic everyday vocabulary first

### Working on Nouns

In simple terms, a noun is the word we use to name a person, an animal, a place or a thing. We often think of nouns within groups (or categories). When developing children's use and understanding of nouns it can be helpful to focus on a different category during a set period (e.g. a week, fortnight or term). Basic categories could include:

- Clothes
- Body parts
- Food
- Animals
- Transport

When introducing on a new category, focus on high-frequency words first. These are words that are more commonly used (e.g. trousers, hands, banana, cat, bus). Aim to focus on 4-5 new words at a time. When they have learnt a range of high-frequency words, you can introduce low-frequency words which are less common (e.g. jeans, elbow, pineapple, snake, helicopter).

Once you have chosen your target category and words, choose a different activity each day to model the language and then support the child to use it themselves.



## Working on Verbs (action words)

Verbs or action words are the words we use to talk about what someone is doing. They can also be used for other functions in a sentence as children develop more complex understanding and use of language. Choose 4-5 verbs to work on at one time and model them during different activities. Start with common verbs that you use all the time, then move on to less frequently used verbs.

Think about all the activities that occur throughout the day that you could use to model action words. Remember, children need to 'experience' and 'hear' the words linked with the actions in real life activities as many times as possible before they will be able to start using the words themselves. The following day-to-day activities create opportunities to model a range of action words. Here's a few examples:

- Greetings – 'waving, smiling, laughing'
- Dinner time – 'cutting, chopping, slicing, pouring, eating, drinking'
- Reading – 'looking, listening, pointing, turning' (a page)
- PE – 'jumping, running, clapping, singing, listening, crawling, hopping'
- Gardening – 'digging, pouring, cutting'
- On the playground – 'running, kicking, climbing, jumping, shouting, whispering'
- In nursery – 'reading, looking, listening, sitting, standing, writing, drawing, painting, choosing'
- Bedtime – 'reading, sleeping, yawning, cuddling, hugging, kissing'

## Developing understanding of concepts

Concepts are words that we use to describe something (e.g. colour, size, texture, shape), talk about time (e.g. yesterday, before, first) or to talk about the position/location (e.g. over, under, in).

It can be difficult for some children to understand or use concept words because they are abstract ideas e.g. you can't see them or touch them like nouns (e.g. house) or actions (e.g. jumping). Concepts are also tricky because they can change in meaning depending on the situation e.g. a dog might be described as 'big' if it is next to a mouse but the same dog might be called 'small' if compared to elephant.

When supporting children to develop their understanding of concepts, aim to choose 2-3 concepts to focus on at a time. These concepts can then be modelled during everyday activities so that children can 'experience' the concept and get to 'hear' it in a range of different situations before trying to use the word themselves.



Early concepts include:

- more
- yes/no
- big/little
- in/on
- up/down
- hot
- wet
- dirty

See below for some activity ideas for working on developing children's vocabulary across basic categories. As you can see, you can incorporate nouns, verbs and concepts into all these activities and a lot of the language overlaps.

**Remember to keep it simple and target only a few words at a time.**

Activity Ideas	Nouns	Verbs	Concepts	Different Language Levels
<b>Clothes</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name clothes when getting dressed</li> <li>• Helping with the washing</li> <li>• Use doll's/ teddy's clothes and hang them up on a washing line (piece of string)</li> <li>• Find pictures of clothes in magazines – cut them out and stick them in a vocab book to look through</li> <li>• Post box – Name pictures of different clothes and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)</li> </ul>	<p>High frequency: t-shirt, socks, dress, shoes, trousers etc</p> <p>Low frequency: dungarees, tights, jeans, slippers etc</p>	<p>Wash, dry, put on, dress, wear, hang up, carry</p>	<p>Big/ little, colours, On/ off, wet/ dry, soft</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single words: "jumper", "socks" "off!"</li> <li>• Two word phrases: "mummy's trousers", "blue jumper"</li> <li>• Sentences: "Daddy's hanging out the t-shirt", "I like pink socks"</li> </ul>
<b>Food</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trip to the supermarket – draw pictures of food on your shopping list and see if the child can name them as you find them in the shop</li> <li>• Include the child in preparing food (under supervision), for example, making a sandwich, a fruit salad or smoothie. Talk</li> </ul>	<p>High frequency: banana, carrot, toast, biscuit etc</p> <p>Low frequency: radish, mushroom, pineapple etc</p>	<p>Cut, wash, eat, drink, mix, cook, pour, buy</p>	<p>Colours, in/ on/ under, big/ small, hot/ cold, empty/ full</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-verbal: "mmmm"</li> <li>• Single words: "apple", "juice", "plate",</li> <li>• Two word phrases: "Ella's banana", "red apple" "cut carrot"</li> <li>• Sentences: "teddy is eating"</li> </ul>



about each ingredient as you use it.					a sandwich”, “the caterpillar ate the sausage”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post box - Name pictures of different food and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)</li><li>• Tea parties</li><li>• Books – Handa’s surprise, The Very Hungry Caterpillar</li><li>• Sorting – sort foods into different colours or fruit vs veg etc</li></ul>					
Activity Ideas	Nouns	Verbs	Concepts	Different Language Levels	
Body Parts					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blowing bubbles on different body parts (take it in turns to request where)</li><li>• Bath time</li><li>• Put stickers on different body parts (or on teddy/ dolly/ animals)</li><li>• Mr Potato Head</li><li>• Tickling games</li><li>• Singing songs – head, shoulders, knees and toes</li><li>• Post box – Name pictures of different body parts and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)</li><li>• Colouring/ Drawing – colour pictures of people/ animals and see if the child can name the body parts as they do this</li><li>• Singing: This is the way we.... (brush our teeth, comb our hair, wash our face etc), If you’re happy and you know it... (clap your hands, stamp your feet, beep your nose, tickle your tummy...)</li></ul>	<p>High frequency: nose, feet, tummy, hands etc</p> <p>Low frequency: Knees, cheeks, nails, elbows etc</p>	<p>Clap, pop, wash, dry, brush, kick, jump, tickle</p>	<p>Wet/ dry, On/ off, big/ little, colours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pre-verbal: “wow”, “ahhh”</li><li>• Single words: “eyes”, “tummy”, “pop”, “more”</li><li>• Two word phrases: “pig’s tail”, “blue eyes”</li><li>• Sentences: “Bubbles on mummy’s hand”, “I’m washing hands”</li></ul>	



Transport				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go on a walk or look out the window and see what vehicles you can see</li> <li>Inset puzzles</li> <li>Playing with toy vehicles – on a car mat, track or placing them in a feely bag and pulling them out</li> <li>Singing – Row, row, row your boat, Wheels on the Bus</li> <li>Post box - Name pictures of different vehicles and then post them in a homemade post box</li> <li>Make a scrap book of different vehicles</li> <li>Books – That's not my...</li> <li>Hide vehicles in the sand/ rice. Encourage them to find name them</li> <li>Sorting – Sort transport into vehicles that go in the sky vs road, 4 wheels vs 2 wheels</li> </ul>	<p>High frequency: car, boat, train, bus etc</p> <p>Low frequency: excavator, helicopter</p>	Drive, fly, ride, walk, run	Fast/ slow, big/ little, colours, in/ on/ under	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-verbal: transport noises (e.g. brrrrm, beep-beep, choo-choo, neow)</li> <li>Single words: "train", "boat", "go!"</li> <li>Two word phrases: "blue car", "big bus", "fast car"</li> <li>Sentences: "the plane is flying in the sky"</li> </ul>



Activity Ideas	Nouns	Verbs	Concepts	Different Language Levels
<b>Animals</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trip to the park, farm or simply going on a walk. Talk about the animals you see and hear</li> <li>I spy with my little eye, something that says.... (woof, quack, meow etc)</li> <li>Playing with small world animals on the farm etc</li> <li>Post box - Name pictures of different animals and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)</li> <li>Singing – Old MacDonald, 3 Little Ducks, See the sleeping bunnies/ elephants/ crocodiles/ lions</li> <li>Feely Bag – Put toy animals in a feely bag and ask the child to pull them out one at a time. Say “You found a.....” and see if they can name them</li> <li>Inset puzzles</li> <li>Colouring/ drawing</li> <li>Books – Brown bear, brown bear; Rumble in the jungle; Gruffalo; That’s not my...</li> <li>Hide animals in the sand/ rice. Encourage them to find the animals and name them</li> <li>Sorting – sort animals into farm vs jungle vs pets</li> </ul>	<p>High frequency: cat, dog, duck, pig, fish, cow etc</p> <p>Low frequency: koala, swan, leopard, giraffe, whale etc</p>	<p>Walk, jump, sleep, run, kick, fly, eat</p>	<p>Big/ little, colours, soft/ smooth, noisy/ quiet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-verbal – animal noises (e.g. woof, oink, roar)</li> <li>Single words: “pig”, “lion”</li> <li>Two word phrases: “cat’s sleeping”, “brown dog”, “cow hiding”</li> <li>Sentences: “the rabbit’s jumping in the sand”, “I found a pink pig”</li> </ul>

