

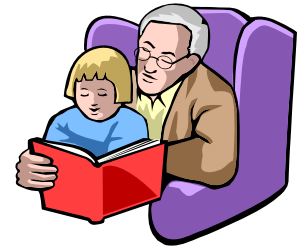


THE INCLUSIVE LINK

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GOOD SPEAKING VOCABULARY: AN ESSENTIAL PRE-READING SKILL

Research shows that children with good oral vocabulary have an easier time learning to read. Most children learn how to use words meaningfully by hearing them used in their natural environment. Children expand their vocabulary by talking with adults, listening to stories, watching television, etc. Rich oral language experiences help build essential skills for learning to read.



Reading activities can begin when a child understands 50 – 100 words. A reading program should start with words that the child already understands. A child who can link the printed word “cat” with the familiar sound and meaning that she has heard and used will want to link other words also with their sounds and meanings. Success in linking the first printed words with familiar sounds will motivate children to learn more words, thus expanding their reading vocabulary and promoting reading fluency.

Some children, however, do not succeed in expanding their speaking vocabulary as they grow. Parents may notice that their child’s vocabulary is different from other children of the same age. Preschool teachers will be able to detect the problem as the difference is more noticeable in a more structured learning environment. Poor vocabulary knowledge may be due to language delay, specific speech disorders, or restricted oral language background.



When they speak, children with poor vocabulary skills may:

- use a lot of gestures or use very limited words
- have problems recalling appropriate words, they may say nothing or use words that have very similar sounds or meanings to the word that they are trying to say.
- leave out words or make up words
- have problems describing things clearly
- have problem making association between words



Did you know?

- Typically a child can say 15 – 20 words spontaneously by age 2 and has a speaking vocabulary of 900 - 1,000 words by age 4.
- Some children can read up to 20 words by age 4.
- Some children with Autism may learn to read well spontaneously though they may not use any spoken language to communicate.

STRATEGIES TO PREPARE CHILDREN WITH POOR LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR READING

1. **Read story books** regularly and often. Select children's books that:
 - are written using simple words and sentences, with frequent repetition of words, phrases and sentences
 - have story lines that meet the intellectual level and language development of the child
 - have humorous and surprising plots that may be exaggerated but not absurd.
 - have vivid and appealing illustrations



2. Increase vocabulary by direct and intensive teaching using interesting oral language activities. For example, use a thematic approach to expand children's knowledge of words for colour, animals, games, daily life activities etc.



3. Children with special needs need a variety of **positive and negative examples** to grasp meaning. For example, to teach the colour RED, use pictures of a red shirt, a red apple, a red car, a red chair. The examples should also vary in size, shape or texture so that children will not think RED is related to size, shape, texture or particular objects and places only. Negative examples of similar objects that are orange, pink, or black should be used to contrast with those in RED.
4. **Create variety** to enhance learning. For example when teaching words for animals, apart from showing pictures or models, engage the children in activities such as singing songs about the animal, moving or making sounds of different animals, listening to stories about animals, etc.
5. Incorporate **language enrichment activities** into your reading program so that reading a word and learning its meaning happens simultaneously wherever possible.

6. **Modify teaching** to suit the needs of children with language difficulties. For example, **group words** based on the level of difficulty or the importance of the words to children in their daily life. Start with words that are easier to teach, use lots of teaching aids and techniques such as matching picture cards.



7. Make **personal books** with photographs or pictures around a certain theme about the child's daily life or particular interest using words and simple sentences to label each picture. I.e. "My Family", "My Favourite Animals", "I Like....", "I Can..."



8. **Be realistic** in your targets - base them on the child's learning capacity

(References: Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, Tarver (2004). *Direct Instruction Reading*. Konza (2003). *Teaching children with reading difficulties*. McMinn (2002). *Supporting children with speech and language impairment and associated difficulties*)

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