

Identifying Children with Vocabulary/Word Finding Difficulties

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the collection of words we understand and use correctly.



Word finding difficulties (WFD)

In our memories words are stored in a 'memory bank'. Children with WFD know what items are called, but cannot retrieve the correct word easily from the 'memory bank' when they want it. This results in the 'tip of the tongue' feeling that we all get from time to time.

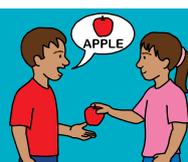
Children with reduced vocabulary / WFD may:

- Use non-specific terms e.g. 'this', 'that', 'thing' etc
- Disrupted flow of speech due to hesitations, backtracking, repetitions and circumlocutions (where the child talks all the way round a target word because they can't remember it)
- Inaccurate productions of the target word i.e. giving a word related in sound e.g. 'cloud' for 'clown' or giving the name of a related item e.g. 'knife for 'scissors'
- Use a description instead of the target word e.g. 'temperature thing' for thermometer
- A child with WFD may say they can't remember a word, this is often accompanied by signs of frustration

Strategies to Support Vocabulary/Word Finding Difficulties

There are several strategies that can be helpful when teaching new vocabulary or facilitating word retrieval skills.

- Let the child hear **new words** many times in different ways / situations
- **Avoid presenting word definitions** immediately yourself – this places the child in a passive role and means lasting learning is less likely to occur. Encourage the child to predict or guess what a word might mean on the basis of its use in context
- **Relate new words** to things the child already knows to encourage connections between new and previous knowledge e.g. "you're right it is an instrument that looks a bit like a guitar, it's called a violin"



- Help the child **incorporate new words into their expressive vocabulary** by setting up tasks where they use the words in a meaningful way. E.g. If teaching the target words sink/float the child could be asked to describe what is happening during an appropriate experiment– “the brick is sinking”.
- Words are often stored in **categories** so teaching vocabulary in this way helps children to make sense of new vocabulary and understand it more easily.
- It may help to start a **vocabulary wordbook** divided into topics and write down new words that are taught in each lesson. The words can then be reinforced at home and the book can be a good revision aid.

How can you help?

Reduce demands

- Avoid asking questions that require a one word answer especially if the word might be difficult for the child to remember
- Asks questions that just need a yes/no answer e.g. “is Paris the capital of France?”
- Give choices e.g. “is a table made from wood or plastic?”
- Encourage the child to describe the object/talk around the subject

Talk around the word

Encourage the child to think of association links to the word

- What category does it belong to?
- What does it do?
- Where would you find it?
- When would you use it?
- What does it look like? – size, shape ,colour, texture
- What sound does it begin with?
- How many syllables does the word have?



Phonemic/ semantic Cues

Children who have WFD may need support accessing and retrieving words. It is important for children to retrieve the word independently rather than an adult naming it and then they can form their own retrieval pathway for accessing the word. Cues are simply giving someone a **hint** or **clue** as to what the missing word might be. Cues can only be used if you know the word the child is trying to retrieve.

- **Phonemic Cues:** These cues use **sounds**. For example, if the missing word is **soup** you could cue that word by making an extended “**S**” sound, “*It starts with Sssssss*”.
- **Semantic Cues:** Try using **category** clues. For example, if the missing word is **horse**, you could cue that word by saying, “*It’s a farm animal.*” “It says neigh”. Give examples of what the object is used for e.g. if the missing word is **hammer**, you could say, “*It is used to hit nails.*”

