Vocabulary

What the skill is: Knowing the meaning of words.

What it's not: Knowing how to spell a word.

Why it's important: Knowing the meaning of many words is a great predictor of school success. The more words you know, the easier it is to learn even more words.

Ways to help your child: These strategies help your child develop a greater understanding of words used in school for reading, writing, and speaking.

Read Aloud – Many families stop reading aloud after children begin to read independently, but **one of the best ways to grow a child's vocabulary is to continue to read aloud to them and talk about books that are more advanced than they can read on their own**. *Did you know that children's books use much richer vocabulary words than any of us use in everyday conversation?*

Add Child-Friendly Definitions – As you are reading aloud, you can naturally add child-friendly definitions for words you think your child may not fully understand. For example, if the book says, "…the rattlesnake is a venomous snake found in..." you would interject a definition, "the rattlesnake is a venomous snake, meaning it has a poisonous bite, found in…" or, "…when wounded, it can…" becomes "…when wounded, or hurt, it can…"

Make Connections – Point out related vocabulary that occurs in several books. For example, "Remember when we were reading last night and the boy in the story was exuberant? It meant he was really excited. Here is that word again, describing the puppy. How can you tell the puppy is exuberant?"

Talk About It – While having everyday conversations with your child, have fun using more interesting words. For example, say vehicle instead of car, pastry instead of donut, and explain instead of tell. Make a list of new words and challenge everyone in the family to use them.

Synonym Word Game – Synonyms are words that mean the same thing, like **finish** and **complete**. You say a word and then everyone takes turns thinking of another word with the same or similar meaning. So, if you say **small**, your child says **little**, big brother says **tiny**, you say **miniscule**, and so on until no one can think of any more words. Repeat with other words.

Let's play the ABC Game with vehicle words!

Okay, **A**irplane

Car

Engine

Bus

Dirtbike

Ferari

ABC Game – In this game, you think of a category and the first person says something from that category that starts with the letter A. The second person says a word that starts with the letter B, and so on. Take turns until you reach the letter Z. If your category was foods, you might say Apples, Bananas, Cherries, Donuts, Eggs, etc. If you choose descriptive words for Jenna, you might come up with Artistic, Bossy, Caring, Devoted, Energetic, etc. Help your child learn the word meanings that are new to them.

Describe It! – In this game, you take turns with your child thinking of as many words as you can to describe an object. You can use the items in your junk drawer, toy box, car, living room, etc. Try to include words that describe the color, size, shape, texture, location, how the object is used, etc.

Tell a Story – Name three things – WHO, ACTION, and WHERE or WHEN and challenge them to make up a story using all three. If you say Dad (WHO), driving in the car (ACTION), and McDonalds (WHERE), your child might make up a story about dad driving to McDonalds to get dinner for the family and forgetting to order a hamburger for them. If you named Grandma (WHO), forgot (ACTION) and Thanksgiving (WHEN), your child might tell a funny story about the time when Grandma made a pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving dinner and forgot to add sugar to it. Encourage your child to use new words you have been discussing as a family as they tell or make up stories.

Picture Study – Look at pictures with your child and ask them to tell you about each one. Teach your child new words they could use in addition to the words they used. If they describe the dog in the picture as big you could teach <u>huge</u> or <u>large</u>. If they point out Uncle Bob under the tree, you can teach the word <u>under</u> or <u>below</u>.

References

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction. New York: Guilford.

De Temple, J., & Snow, C. E. (2003). Learning words from books. In A. van Kleeck & S. Stahl (Eds.), On reading books to children (pp. 16–36). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ehri, L. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. Scientific Studies of Reading, 18, 5–21.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks.

Hemphill, L & Tivnan, T., (2008). The Importance of Early Vocabulary. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 13:426–451.

Neuman, S. B., & Wright, T. S. (2010). Promoting language and literacy development for early childhood educators: A mixed methods study of coursework and coaching. The Elementary School Journal, 111, 63–86. doi:10.1086/653470

National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. Retrieved from https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/NELPReport09.pdf