

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

### Supporting a Child's Vocabulary Development

Teaching is language based, so children with poor skills in vocabulary and concepts will be at a disadvantage in school. Vocabulary may be regarded as the building blocks of all language. Children may have a poor vocabulary for a range of reasons including general poor language skills or specific language difficulties. Explicit teaching of vocabulary can therefore assist the language skills of all children and will also impact on reading comprehension.

Vocabulary means words, whilst concepts are broader ideas. When vocabulary is linked, concepts can be formed. Thinking in concepts allows for the organisation of large amounts of information.

#### Strategies to support vocabulary development -

- **Visual and multi-sensory strategies** support the learning of vocabulary. Once children can connect words, concepts and ideas they can think in new ways, solve problems and ask questions. Children with language difficulties often have problems organising information.
- **Grouping and categorisation** skills support storage and retrieval of new words. Strengthening the child's knowledge of categories by being able to classify them allows children to remember words. This means they are able to link new words with information they already know. Using category boxes or collections encourages vocabulary development by the naming of the objects, describing the objects, using the correct verbs associated with the objects etc.
- **Using word maps** to develop awareness of word relationships (category, opposite, same as, kind of etc.) through games.
- **Topic webs** (or mind maps) can be used to show a child how words link together. Make sure you use picture/symbols to help the child remember the words. You can gradually add to the topic web over time and come back to 'revise' old words before adding new ones.

### General strategies to consider -

- Never presume a child will know a word, even if it's a very basic word.
- Repeat and revisit new words frequently
- Use books with pictures and diagrams.
- Encourage the child to draw new words. Doing something active to internalise the word whenever possible.
- Use real objects and pictures (use key vocabulary on class displays with the words and pictures together).
- Children need to say new words themselves not just hear an adult say them.

### Further vocabulary development opportunities:

- Vocabulary will not be internalised unless it is used in sentences. Opportunities to use vocabulary verbally are necessary.
- Word pots, word walls, word bags etc. may be used to support both curriculum and general vocabulary. Asking children to put a chosen word into a sentence reinforces understanding.
- Word games are available for all levels of vocabulary development.
- Talk about the topic. Repeating the vocabulary and give the children opportunities to identify key topic words. Make a topic web.