

VOCABULARY

WHAT IS VOCABULARY?

Your child's vocabulary is the set of words he uses and understands when speaking, writing, and reading.

WHY ARE VOCABULARY SKILLS IMPORTANT?

Building vocabulary words is key to reading, to writing, to verbal expression, and in many ways, vocabulary is key to building analytical and critical thinking. Building vocabulary skills improves reading comprehension and reading fluency. Without building a large vocabulary, students cannot read successfully.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY SKILLS

Children are greatly influenced by the amount of conversation, by the nature of the conversation (and the vocabulary used), and by the "word awareness" of the family. There are a great number of families where vocabulary word games are played with the children to build vocabulary and "word awareness" skills. Many listening and talking experiences prepare children to read. Here are some activities to try:

- Begin talking, singing, and reading frequently to your children when they are babies.
- When giving directions to your younger children, use short sentences and explain clearly what you want them to do. As they grow older, increase the length of the directions using words that describe. (For example, instead of saying, "Get the book," you can say, "Please bring me your favorite storybook. It is on the desk in your room.")
- Ask your children questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Some questions that help them to talk more openly are: "Why do you think that happened?" "What do we do next?" "What would happen if we did it this way?" "What can we do about that?" "How can we make this better?"
- Listen carefully as your children talk to you. Answer their questions and take time to explain things to them.
- Teach your children songs and poems that are fun to sing and say (for example, songs like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and poems like "Wee Willie Winkie" or "Little Miss Muffet").
- Play games such as "Red-Light, Green-Light" and "Simon Says" that require talking, listening, following directions, and giving directions.

- Set aside a special time each day to read aloud to your children. Talk about the vocabulary words you come across in the book. Have your children retell the stories back to you.
- Read informational books aloud for as long as you can read and your children can listen. If your children become restless, lay the book aside and come back to it at another time.
- Record yourself reading a book and give the tape to your children. Let them play the tape and read along in the book on their own.
- Have your young children "read" to you from a picture book by making up their own stories about the pictures.
- Take nature walks in the neighborhood or at local parks. Spend time talking in detail with your children about things you can see, hear, or touch such as leaves, rain, and caterpillars.
- When possible, take your children on trips to zoos, museums, nature trails, and historical sites. Talk about the interesting and unusual things you see.
- Draw pictures with your children and take turns telling stories about the pictures.
- Pick a topic of interest to your children and have them learn new things about it. Ask them to tell you and other family members what they have learned.
- Watch educational television programs with your children and talk with them about those programs.
- Encourage your child to read on his own. The more children read, the more words they encounter and learn.

Adapted from: Beginning Reading Instruction: Practical Ideas for Parents. (1996). Texas Education Agency.

Vocabulary Dictionary Help children keep track of the interesting words they come across by having them create their own vocabulary dictionary! A page is dedicated for each letter of the alphabet. Simply have children write the word, write synonyms or the meaning of the word, and draw a picture to help them remember the word.

My Word Meaning Choose a word that you will come across in a read-aloud. Write that word in the left column of a sheet of paper. Have children draw a picture or write words to show what that word means to them **before** the reading. **After**

you read, have the students draw a picture or write words if their meaning has changed.

My Colorful Synonyms Begin by collecting bags of crayons containing various shades of a specific color. (For example, a "red" bag could include: Red-Orange, Hot Magenta, Mahogany, Razzmatazz, Maroon, & Red-Violet). On a large chart paper write a word your child can easily generate synonyms for, like "happy". Write the word and color over it with a red crayon. Have students think of other words that mean about the same thing as the word "happy". Write them down and shade over each word with a different shade of red. This activity helps children understand that synonyms are words that mean about the same thing but have different spellings, just like there are various shades of crayons. Other words to try are: sad, good, bad, big, little, hot, cold, or like.