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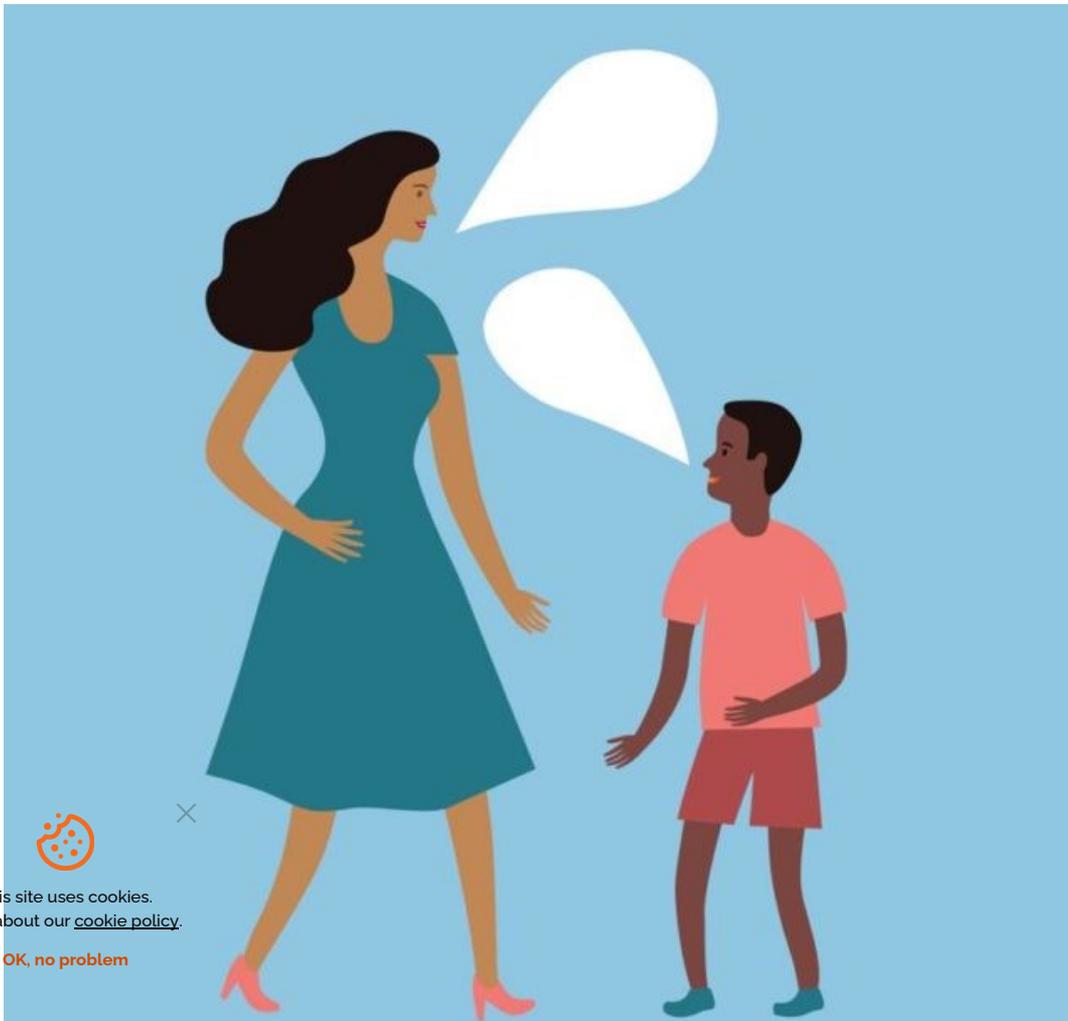
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21 fun ways to improve your child's vocabulary

25th November 2019 in [Parents and tutors](#) by [Olivia Sumpter](#)



Ideas for reading, talking and playing as a family

Developing a wide vocabulary is fundamentally important for children. The vocabulary size of a 4 year old is an accurate predictor of educational outcomes at age sixteen, and a broad vocabulary boosts social skills and confidence through childhood and into adulthood.

Alongside formal education, your input as a parent to your child's vocabulary is crucial. As much as 95% of the words a child knows is also found in their parents' vocabulary, and parental involvement in learning increases children's motivation and achievement.

It's easy to integrate vocabulary development into your home life and every day routine through reading, talking and playing. Help to give your child a head start in life while enjoying quality time together as a family.

Here are our top suggestions:

1. Bring new words to life

If your child learns a new noun, find a picture of it online or in a book. If it's an adjective, think of things that can be described using the word, like a meagre lunch or a diligent student, or if it describes an emotion, show the feeling with a facial expression or hand gesture. It's fun to act out new verbs – try prowling around the house or sauntering to the shops.

2. Visualise new words on paper

To help remember the meaning of the word 'reluctant', you and your child could draw a situation that represents that word for them, such as a picture of them eating Brussel sprouts.

3. Encourage your child to query any new words they come across

Whether they ask you for a meaning, identify it themselves by probing its context or look it up in a dictionary, make sure they don't feel embarrassed about finding out the meaning of strange words. Take time to explain a new word if they ask you, or enthusiastically find out its meaning together. Show interest and delight when they share a new word with you.

4. Talk constantly with your child

Stimulating parent-child conversations are known to be one of the main influencing factors on vocabulary development. You don't have to talk about anything exciting – if you're at a loss, just describe what happened to you earlier. While your child was at school, your daily routine at home or even draw on previous family holidays and other past shared experiences. Further afield – whether you're visiting a museum, a supermarket or boarding a train – talk

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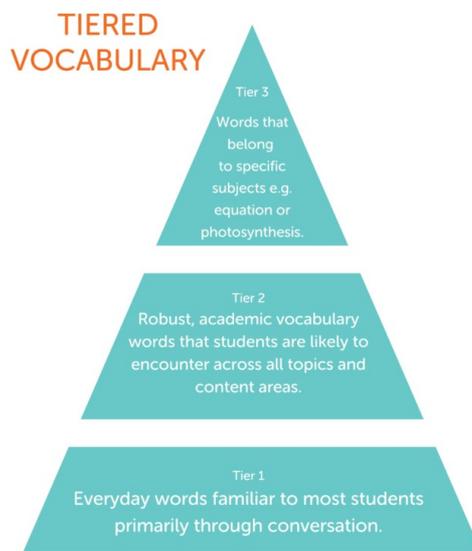
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5. Have two-way conversations with your child

Don't just launch into a monologue when you talk to them. Make sure your chat develops into a conversation by asking your child open-ended questions about how their own day has gone (nothing is too mundane to be shared!). The more practice they get at articulating their thoughts and feelings the more confident they'll grow in using newly learned words.

6. Don't 'dumb down' your own vocabulary

Use as wide a vocabulary as you can. Whether you're using nouns to name new or unusual objects, or adjectives to describe emotions, there's no need to 'dumb down' your speech – aim to speak to them as if you're speaking to another adult. Academics call the type of challenging words that you can drop into everyday life Tier 2 words. These are the type of words your child will need to know in order to succeed at school, such as procedure, consistent and analysis.



7. Put new words into context

A word that your child encounters in a meaningful sentence (whether that's heard or read) is much easier (and more fun) to learn than one that they find in isolation or as part of a list. For example, if you were to describe a colleague who has lost their pet as being disconsolate, the context of loss should help them understand its meaning.

8. Position a word in different scenarios

When you 'drop' a new word into conversations, try to use it in various guises to help embed your child's understanding of it. For example, if your child has learned the word 'fortunate', you could remark how you're fortunate you're part of such a kind family, and a while later say you're fortunate the supermarket hasn't run out of bread though it's late in the day. Alternatively, you could give a usage example yourself, then ask them if they can think of their own: you might say that you felt ecstatic when your child was born, for example, while your child might describe themselves as feeling ecstatic at their birthday party.



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9. Repeat, repeat, repeat

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For the learning of a new word to become embedded, a child needs to encounter it more than once. Experts generally agree that typically a child needs to hear a new word between 4 and 12 times before it's committed to their long-term memory and so truly added to their vocabulary.

10. Don't bombard your child with lots of new words at once!

Introduce a manageable number of new words at a time – say, up to seven a week – for the whole family to then drop into conversation as naturally as possible.

11. Encourage them to read books

This is an obvious point, but an extremely valid one. Unsurprisingly, numerous studies show that children who read a lot have wider vocabularies than those who don't. This is because books typically include a much broader range of words than we use in everyday conversation.

12. Read aloud to your child

Even if they are your child is a good reader, reading aloud to them helps them access harder texts than they'd be able to read on their own. This exposes them to more challenging words, and also creates the opportunity for conversation between you.

13. Encourage your child to read material other than books

New words can be learnt in a multitude of places. At home, a cereal packet could introduce your child to the word 'ingredients' and a car handbook to the word 'metallic'. Don't overlook the merits of reading magazines and newspapers, or online content either.

14. Allow your child to choose what they read

Whether they read alone or you read together, if they're interested in a topic or author, they are more likely to be absorbed in the story and so be curious about any new words they encounter – as well as developing a life-long love of reading.

15. Encourage them to tackle some challenging reads

The best approach to reading takes in a broad spectrum that includes some challenging reads to help stretch your child's vocabulary – but just like adults, children need some intellectual 'downtime' and an easy-to-digest, emotionally nurturing read at times.



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16. Don't over-rely on a dictionary to help understand new words

OK, no problem

Contrary to popular belief, they aren't always the best way to help your child learn vocabulary because definitions often include more unfamiliar words. When you encounter a new word, in the first instance you could look together for contextual clues together. If you can't spot any such clues, simply give them an easy-to-understand definition, for example, ecstatic means really happy.

17. Help your child look for word roots

If they didn't understand the word 'audible' in the sentence, 'Lily was barely audible', for example, think about other words with the root 'aud' that your child already knows, like such as audio and audience. This will help your child understand that the word is about hearing and realise the sentence is describing how Lily is speaking very quietly.

18. Use synonyms (similar words) to help define a word

If you're reading or talking together and your child doesn't know a word, rather than interrupt the flow you could give a quick definition in the form of a synonym (e.g. bereft – that means losing something). Then at the end of the chapter or conversation remember to go back to the word, pointing to it if it's in a book and repeating it out loud so they can get used to its sound. By the same token, dipping into a thesaurus can be useful because they offer a range of synonyms and antonyms (words that mean the opposite) too, for contrast. They can also be useful with creative writing by helping prevent overuse of a single word.

19. Play games together

Board games such as Scrabble and Boggle (including their Junior versions) are a great way to discover new words and consolidate knowledge. Word searches can also introduce new words and provide conversation-starters, while crosswords are a good way to link a word to its meaning. Even 'I spy...' can be a way to introduce new nouns.

20. Encourage your child to write stories

If they enjoy it, incorporating words they've learned recently will help their creativity and imagination and they'll feel proud when they realise how much they've learned.

21. Be seen to learn yourself, too

If you encounter a word that's new to you, make a point of remarking on this to your child and introducing it to them – however obscure it is. As well as teaching them a new word, it conveys your own curiosity and shows them learning is a lifelong process.

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How can Bedrock Learning help your child?

OK, no problem

Bedrock Learning is an online programme for children in Years 3 to 11 that teaches the vocabulary they need to succeed in school. Children take digital lessons that include fiction and non-fiction texts and then take fun learning activities, games and quizzes to help develop an understanding of ambitious vocabulary.

Over 120,000 children in schools across the world are already making statistically significant gains to their vocabulary by using our programme. In response to demand, we are now thrilled to make the programme available to parents and tutors for the first time. For a limited time only, you can get a month's free trial to see how your child can benefit from Bedrock Learning.

Boost your child's literacy and vocabulary with Bedrock

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