

Word finding

Some children need extra help to learn and remember new words. A child with word finding difficulties may use sounds, gestures or non-specific words when talking. They may roar to label a lion or bear, and may spread their arms like wings to label a bird or an airplane.

How can I help my child learn new words?

Think of a category, such as “animals” or “foods”. Ask your child to name items in that category. Then, name a sub-category, like “farm animals” or “breakfast foods,” and have your child add more words. Add your own ideas, too. This helps your child learn words in an organized way.

Expand your child’s vocabulary by helping him or her find words that mean the same or similar things. For example, if you are at the park and see a dog, you could say “That dog is big! What is another word for big?” Help your child find other words for “big” such as huge, large and enormous. You could also ask “What are other things we see that are big?”

You can ask your child to find a word that has an opposite meaning. For example, you could talk about soft and hard. Ask your child, “A pillow is soft but a rock is...?” or “What words mean the opposite of soft?” Possible answers include hard, rough, and bumpy.

How can I help my child?

Start with a word your child knows, and ask what words describe it. For example, “cat” could lead to “a big, yellow, mouse-chasing cat with four paws, whiskers, and a long tail.”

Play a guessing game. Ask your child, “Can you think of an animal that lives on a farm and says ‘moo?’” Use clues that are descriptive (tells how it looks or feels) and functional (tells what it does). Then it’s your turn to guess. Ask your child to imagine something and describe it for you.

Ask your child to tell you about past or future events. Start with simple questions that your child will know the answer to. For example, if your child ate an apple for a snack, ask an hour later, “What did you have for your snack?” If needed, help your child with visual cues (show another apple) or verbal cues (“It’s a fruit” or “It begins with an A”). Gradually, ask your child to tell you more about past events and future plans.

Play sentence-completing games. “I buy bread at the ____.” You can also lead in with a few words like, “peanut butter and _____”.

These activities will help your child build a larger vocabulary by learning new words. Try to make vocabulary building fun and help your child enjoy using new words.

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions, please ask your child’s doctor or nurse practitioner.