

# Every Child a Talker Every Adult Involved

## Developing Children's Word Power

By the time they are four most children use thousands of different words in their everyday talk, and understand thousands more. This vocabulary helps them express their ideas and feelings, and to understand other people. It is also the foundation for developing effective reading and creative writing.

One of the ways we can help all children is to help them learn, and use, a rich vocabulary. Why call a young horse a 'baby horse' when we can call it by its proper name: a 'foal'. Why say 'baby lion' when it is really a 'lion cub'. Why be satisfied that children know basic fruits and vegetables when they could learn many more?

How can we help children expand their vocabularies?

- By being precise when we talk with them. Instead of saying, 'Put your top on', why not be precise and say 'Put on your *cardigan/jumper/hoody top*.'
- Use a variety of different words. Instead of saying, 'Teddy's feeling sad' why not say, 'Teddy's feeling miserable/fed up/unhappy/' Or any other word that might describe how he feels.
- Think of 'five for one'. For every word a child uses regularly, aim for him to learn five more.
- So if he knows 'horse' can we help him to learn 'foal/donkey/saddle/reins/hay'?  
If he knows 'chicken' can we help him learn 'cockerel/rooster/hen/chick/eggs'?

Apart from by hearing the words we use, how do children learn vocabulary quickest?

All children learn by adults responding to what children say, and by talking about what they are doing.

How we respond will depend on the child's age and stage of development. If a 15-month-old says 'dog' we will be delighted. But if a 4 year old calls a fox a 'dog' then we would want to help him.

Here are some effective ways of developing vocabulary. You will probably have more ideas than these!

- Sharing non-fiction books
- Sharing story books
- Singing and rhyming
- Small world play
- Acting out stories
- Play in the home corner

