

## Language Skills Impact Reading Skills

Young children need a variety of skills to become a successful reader. What you do when your child is very young helps her get ready to read later on. Early literacy skill development actually begins at birth.

Experts suggest that there are six pre-reading skills that all children must know before they can learn to read: phonological awareness, print motivation, vocabulary, print awareness, narrative skills and letter knowledge. Research shows that children who are read to consistently from an early age tend to have larger vocabularies and better language skills when they start school.

Why is this important? Language skills impact reading skills.

Shared reading experiences, language development and reading achievement are all strongly related.

Storybook exposure directly predicts kindergarten vocabulary and the frequency children report reading for pleasure in grade four. Children's vocabulary measured at the beginning of grade one is a really good predictor of their reading level at the end of grade one and the end of grade three. Many studies show that vocabulary is the best predictor of reading comprehension at the ends of grade two and three and that vocabulary growth is directly linked to overall school achievement.

As you can see, vocabulary matters!

Vocabulary is all about knowing the names of things, feelings, concepts and ideas. Most children learn vocabulary at an impressive rate during the early years. Children entering school typically know about 3000 to 5000 words. Vocabulary knowledge is cumulative, and knowledge of words facilitates vocabulary learning. Children will start out learning vocabulary slowly and accelerate over time. Readers continue to get better and better, but there is no end point at which learning vocabulary skills comes to an end! As you know, even as adults we continue to learn new vocabulary!

For children especially, words are best acquired through oral interaction-that is through storybook reading and conversations involving others. You can help your child's vocabulary by reading a variety of books with her-both fiction and non-fiction, and by naming all the objects in her world. Let her benefit from your own knowledge of words.

Children need to hear words in different contexts. Tell her new words to use for things she already has a simple word for such as *enormous* for *big*, and *exhausted* for *tired*. Use familiar and new words in different experiences your child has. She may feel *exhausted* after playing soccer and before heading to bed. Children with rich vocabularies have an enormous educational advantage. Knowing many words helps children recognize written words and makes it easier to gain meaning from what is being read. Vocabulary is a tool for thinking and learning about the world. The more words your child knows, the more information she has. Choose books with novel or rare words not typically used in everyday conversations. Introduce non-fiction books as they have different words from those used in stories. When you encounter an unfamiliar word, don't ignore it, explain what it means and different ways it can be used. Children need to repeat unfamiliar words often and then use them in daily conversations to strengthen their understanding. For a familiar word, go ahead and introduce a less familiar word. For example, "He is feeling scared. He is frightened of the dark. Frightened is another word for scared." Don't hesitate to add descriptive words or more information to what is already in the book.

Vocabulary, both spoken (expressive) and understanding (receptive) is so valuable. Not all children have the same opportunity to learn new words, and too many children are receiving a poor start. Adult input expands children's vocabulary, so make vocabulary learning at home a priority and help your child become a successful reader. Talk, read aloud, explain, describe, comment, ask and answer. Be a word wizard starting today! Talking, singing, reading, writing and playing with your child will help her develop her vocabulary skills.

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