

PARENT GUIDE SERIES

Growing Your Child's Vocabulary

Simple daily habits that build word knowledge



For Parents & Caregivers

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Why Vocabulary Matters

Vocabulary is one of the strongest predictors of reading success. By 3rd grade, word knowledge becomes the primary driver of comprehension. The good news: vocabulary grows naturally through conversation, reading, and play.

- A child needs ~5 new words per day from age 18 months to have 8,000 words by age 6
- The average high school graduate knows about 40,000 words
- Between grades 3–12, children learn ~3,000 words per year
- Most words are learned through reading and conversation — not flashcards

Daily Habits That Work

Use Big Words Naturally

Don't dumb down your vocabulary. If you'd say 'exhausted' to an adult, say it to your child. Then add: 'That means really, really tired.' Children need to hear sophisticated words in natural contexts.

Read Widely

The more genres your child reads, the more words they encounter. Mix nonfiction, poetry, graphic novels, and magazines alongside chapter books.

Explain, Don't Just Define

'Hesitant means when you're not sure if you want to do something — like standing at the edge of the pool deciding whether to jump.'

Play With Words

- Synonym Swap: Replace 'big' with 'enormous' or 'colossal'
- Word of the Day: Introduce a new word at breakfast; see who uses it most
- 'What's Another Word For...?' — play in the car, at dinner, walking the dog
- Meme Game: Describe a meme using only fancy vocabulary words