



Word Finding Difficulties

What is a word finding difficulty?

Difficulty 'getting hold of' the words you know at the time when you need to use them.

When words are learnt they are stored in the mind. They might be stored by meaning (semantics) or they might be stored by how they sound (phonemic).

If we store by meaning we can make links – e.g. – apple and banana go together because they are both types of fruit.

Words can also be stored according to how they sound (phonemic) and the sound properties of the word – for example the first sound of the word, or words that rhyme with it.

When we store words correctly in our own head, we may store them according to:-

- what group it belongs to (categories)
- what it is used for (function)
- where it is found (location)
- what it looks like (e.g shape)
- sound properties of the word.

How do I spot children with word finding difficulties?

- Difficulty naming pictures/words that are familiar to them.
- Delay in retrieving/saying the word e.g. slow speech
- Pauses, hesitations, restarts, re-phrasing – particularly when forming sentences.
- Saying the wrong word from the same category (fruit/vegetable), a similar sounding word (candle for camel), an opposite (hot instead of cold).
- The child used a word yesterday but can't use the same word today.
- Not keen to participate in small group/whole class discussions.
- Going 'round the houses' to explain something – and can talk a lot but not get to the point.
- Using general words like 'thing' 'it' 'that' and 'there' rather than specific naming words. They may also over use words like 'got' and 'doing' rather than specific action words – for example "I got a fish" instead of "I caught a fish".



Frustration and Lack of Confidence

- Children with word finding difficulties might become more self-conscious or frustrated because they find it hard to think of the names of words.
- They may avoid communicating especially in larger groups e.g. classroom.
- The flow of conversation might be affected if the child gets some way through the conversation then cannot think of a word, gives up and says "it doesn't matter".

How can I support children with word finding difficulties?

We need to use a variety of approaches – both visual (pictures and written words) and phonemic (how the word sounds). When a child is struggling to find a word, try asking these questions:

Cueing techniques

Phonemic (sound) cueing

- What sound does the word start with?
- What words rhyme with it?
- How many syllables are there? 3 syllables

Example: Give the child the first sound in the word, e.g.

Child: "That car had a _____"

Adult: "Cr____"

Child: "Yeah, crash"

Semantic (word meaning) cueing

- What group does it belong to? (categories)
- What is it used for? (function)
- Where is it found? (location)
- What does it look like? (e.g shape)

Example: Ask the child to describe the meaning of the word for the listener to name,

Child: "I can't find my, you know the thing I write with"

Adult: "Your pen"



Example: Encouraging the child to describe the use of the word

Child: "I went to the shop and bought _____"

Adult: "Tell me what you do with it"

Child: "You wash your clothes with it, I know, detergent"

It can also help if the child is given new school vocabulary to talk about at home 2 weeks before introduction to the classroom. This helps them to store it correctly.

Activities

Five Clues

1. What group does it belong to? (categories)
2. What is it used for? (function)
3. Where is it found? (location)
4. What does it look like? (e.g. shape)
5. What's the first sound? (phonemic)

Place some picture cards upside down. Take it in turns to choose a picture from the pile and talk about it using the 5 clues.

An adult may have to demonstrate this a few times first before the children have a go. You can write the clues down as prompts. The other players have to guess what the object is i.e. if the picture is of an orange you could say:

- you can eat it,
- it is a fruit,
- it starts with the sound 'o'.
- you find it in the fruit bowl / shops / on a tree
- it is orange in colour / it is round

To choose your picture or to make the game more fun you could play with a "head bandz" game, "What's in the bag?", or "Go Fish".

Word Links

Use a Word Link to teach and use semantic and phonological "cues".

The child / children can think of the words for each link. See the examples below:

