



Advice for Parents: Children with Word Finding Problems

Many children with language-learning disabilities are deficient in word knowledge. During early childhood, they are often late in acquiring their first words and are slow to add words to their vocabulary.

During later childhood and adolescence, they may have poor comprehension of words and expressions that have multiple meanings, causing difficulties in reading comprehension. At the same time, because reading is critical for vocabulary development, difficulty with reading often delays growth in word knowledge and reduces the database from which to select appropriate words in speaking and writing.

Among the causes for word-finding disorders are:

- Vocabulary weakness which results in reduced ability to store words; and
- Weak or limited word retrieval skills.

Word-finding deficits are often recognized during general conversation activities. Clues often surface when a child uses frequent pauses, repetitions, circumlocutions, fillers such as "uhm" and "err," and non-specific words (i.e. "thing" or "stuff"), resulting in imprecise communication. When children and adolescents experience difficulty in finding words, they often produce erroneous words as substitutions for the target words. In addition, they often have extended response times when naming objects, exhibit reduced accuracy, and trade speed for accuracy or accuracy for speed.

If your child struggles with word finding problems, here are a few things you can do to help.

- Ask your child to describe an object, event, or action if he cannot find the right word to use. Talking around a word can sometimes help a child find the right word.
- Encourage your child to use a hand motion or gesture to help him trigger the word he wants to say. Gross motor movement is sometimes connected to increased word finding.
- When you provide the word for your child, use it a few different times in that conversation. A playful repetition of the word can help increase the memory of that word in the future.

Children and adolescents with suspected word-finding disorders should be referred by their teachers or parents for professional speech and language evaluations. Typically, assessment of word retrieval skills using formal standardized testing and observation of a child's conversational performance are tools used to determine whether a word-finding problem impairs the child's ability to communicate effectively.