

PLAY & LEARN AT HOME

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PLAY ACTIVITIES TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S VOCABULARY

LEARNING ON THE GO

The bigger a child's vocabulary, the easier it will be for them to learn to read. There are two parts to reading: **decoding**, which is understanding letter sounds and putting them together to pronounce words, and **comprehension**, which is understanding what those words mean.



An easy way to build vocabulary and make comprehension easier is to read nonfiction books! The great thing about nonfiction is that you can read it in several ways:

- Read all the way through from start to finish. Some nonfiction books have a great story. You can ask questions along the way if you want.
- Read just the parts that interest you. Some non-fiction books are filled with facts and you don't have to read the whole book but can take it in smaller "bites."
- Read the pictures! If your child has a big interest in the subject matter, you can ask them to tell YOU about what they see in the pictures. You can also ask questions and talk about what you are learning which is another great way to grow vocabulary!

Find out what your child is really interested in right now (Trains? Dinosaurs? Volcanoes?) and pick out some non-fiction books on your next trip to the library.

FAMILY PLACE

A little bit of play leads to a big bit of learning. **And one of the most important things to develop through play is a child's vocabulary.** A large vocabulary is directly related to a child's reading and learning success. Children who know a lot of words when starting school may read more easily and process new information faster. They understand new things faster because they don't get stuck on word meanings. Here's a simple play activity designed to grow your child's vocabulary.

Adapt it for your own child's age:

Ages 1-3: Peek-a-boo Collections: Find a collection of things in your house. For example, gather a collection of socks, mugs, stuffed animals, or anything else that makes a natural grouping. Place your collection in a "Peek a Boo Box" (can be any box or container). Let your little one reach in and pull out the items one at a time. See if your child can name each item. Help them find words to describe them. Talk about how the items are the same or different.

Ages 4-5: Museum Collections: Help your child to gather groups of related items to create an "exhibit" at home. Then ask them to tell you about their collection. Ask questions and offer observations with descriptive words. Naming and describing items in a collection will build your child's vocabulary. (Activity ideas adapted from Vroom.org.)



Mixing spoon, teaspoon, ladle, serving spoon, measuring spoons, sugar spoon, iced tea spoon.

LITTLE EXPLORERS

STEAM - science, technology, engineering, art and math - is about discovery, exploring the world around us and asking questions about how or why something works. Children are great at this!

Follow the child's lead (observe, listen, try their ideas) **and use conversations that build vocabulary and use STEAM concepts.** The more words children hear in conversations during their early childhoods, the larger their vocabulary will be when they go to school. That big vocabulary helps children recognize words when they see them for the first time in print.

Learn along with children! You don't have to have all the right answers to help children learn about STEAM. You can say, "That's a great question. How could we find out together?" It's also okay if children give answers that aren't quite right. Ask them to explain their thinking. Communicating and trying to make sense of the world – even if you don't have all the correct answers – are important STEAM skills!

Here is a simple science experiment. Use STEAM language and vocabulary like **notice, wonder, observation** and **hypothesis.**

Choose activities based on the child's interest.



Explore in the Tub Activity



During bath time, provide plastic containers and cups, combs, blocks, metal spoons, and sponges for your child to explore which objects sink or float. Guess which shapes and materials will sink or float before you drop them into the water.

Help your child talk about sinking and floating! Here are some ways to observe:

- "I notice some objects that sink go below the top of the water. The soap sank to the bottom of the tub."
- "I notice some objects that float stay on top of the water. The squeezey bath toy is floating on the top of the water right now!"

READY, SET, KINDERGARTEN!

Vocabulary is an important part of learning to read. When children have heard a word already, they're able to sound it out and comprehend its meaning, allowing them space to decode newer words.



Learning vocabulary takes **mental flexibility.** A child's brain must be able to learn new information and apply it to what they've already learned, especially if this means adjusting what they've already learned.

The next time you come across a challenge, narrate your thinking for your child. Is the entrance to your street blocked by a garbage truck? What other streets could you take?



Give children the opportunity to solve their own problems creatively, too. When they come across a challenge, help them brainstorm ideas, without providing the answer. You might be surprised by their innovative solutions!

Here are other ways to build flexible thinking:

- *Tell jokes and make puns.* Your children will love to come up with their own jokes, even if they don't always make sense to you. Understanding that the same word can have more than one meaning builds vocabulary and is part of being a flexible thinker!
- *Read books with word play.* Rhymes, poems, and tongue-twisters often use interesting and new vocabulary.
- *Find new uses for everyday objects.* Could this banana be used as a phone? How about a spatula as a microphone?
- *Play dress-up or pretending games.* See our September handout for great ways to imagine the day away.
- *Weigh the pros and cons of a decision.* Ice cream for dinner? I can think of many reasons why we should or shouldn't.

For even more resources, or to talk to an early literacy librarian, visit arapahoelibraries.org/0-5, or create an Educator and Parent Support request at arapahoelibraries.org/educator-and-parent-support.