**VOCABULARY GAMES AND ACTIVITIES:**

We use the meanings of words to “file” them in our memory and then enable us to get them back out again when we need to use them. Children who have weak vocabulary skills tend to need extra time and support to build up their filing system for words. Games in which the child is encouraged to think about the different meanings and key ideas behind words are a great way to help.

**Name/label things during the day.** Encourage the child to name things when you are out for a walk/looking at a book/on the bus/at the supermarket etc.

**Sort words according to their category.** To begin with you might choose simple categories, e.g. animals, food, clothes. In this activity there is a clear distinction between the different groups. As the child’s skills improve then encourage them to think about more refined groupings, e.g. puddings, drinks, snacks. You can think of categories for all sorts of word types, e.g. Actions might be distinguished by who does them – human, animal or machine or by which part of the body you use- brain, hand, face. Ask the child to talk to you about why they are putting the pictures or words into the categories that they choose. This will help to boost their skills.

**Recall words within categories.** Once a child is good at sorting words then you might see if they can remember words to fit into different categories. You could hold up 5 fingers and see if they can think of 5 different plant words. If they find this hard then try starting them off by naming a few things yourself.

**Fruit Salad.**  This is a group game. Each child chooses a fruit. The adult starts them off by naming 2 of the fruits. These children have to stand up and swap seats. The adult tries to sit on one of the seats, leaving one of the children with nowhere to sit. This child then moves to the middle of the circle and calls the next 2 fruits.

**Memory Games.** Games such as “I went shopping and I bought…” require children to name and recall items in categories. The repetition involved can really help some children. If you are using the game to work on vocabulary skills make a picture list as you go round. You can then use this to support children’s recall of words.

**Bean Bag game.** This is a group game. A beanbag is thrown to one of the children who says their name and then something within an agreed category, e.g. “My name is Emma and I like eating apples.” They then choose who to throw to next.

**Automatic Response/Sentence Closure.** See if the child can finish off familiar pairs or sentences. For example, Cup and ….. (saucer) Bats and ……. (balls).

**Find the item.** This is a version of “I spy”. Look at a complex picture together (or use the setting you are in) and give each other clues for something that you can see. To begin with you could look for lots of things, e.g. “Let’s find everything that is purple.” Give more specific skills as the child’s skills develop.

**Question Bingo:** Give the child a set of pictures. Ask questions which match the pictures and see if the child can find the correct one and give it to you. E.g. Lay out the pictures book, car, money, tree – Ask “What has pages?” “What has leaves?”

**Mime.** Have a set of objects or pictures and see if the child can mime one for you to guess. (This might be very hard for children with motor planning difficulties). Swap over and see if they can guess what you are miming. Get them to tell you why they gave the answer they did, e.g. “you were pretending to peel the banana and then you ate it.”

**Noun- Verb.** Can the child think of an action word that is usually used with a word that you say? E.g. “Spoon” – “eat.”

**Guess the Word.** In this game you have a set of pictures/words and the child has to try and guess which one you are describing. For example: “It is an animal, it is grey, it lives in Africa or the zoo, it is very big, it has a trunk.” The child can guess at any time. If they are correct you can move on to the next picture. If they are wrong remind them of what you have already said and give them more information. This game helps children to build up their store of meanings and practise finding words from their filing system. You can use cards that you have made or commercially available games (but make sure that the vocabulary is suitable for the child’s level). To make this game harder, describe a card that the child cannot see.

**Take the definitions challenge.** Make a simple definitions mat. This might be a strip of sections moving from left to right or a circular board with a space for the word in the middle. Work with the child to see if you can find something to say about the word for each section of the mat. Sections to include might be:

Appearance: What does it look like? Feel like? Smell like? Made of?

Function: What does it do/How do we use it?

People: Who uses it?

Time: When do we use it?

Place: Where do we use it?

Family: What group does it belong to? Think of something else in the family.

Association: What goes with it?

Reaction: How does it make you feel?

You might need to change the sections depending on the skills of the child and the types of words that you are working with

Alternatively you could make up a set of cards with the different questions on and see if the child can work through the pack for one of their vocabulary box words.

**Characteristics Game.** Have characteristics/category cards in piles. Choose 2 and see if the child can name something that has both characteristics, e.g. long and yellow – “banana”. Increase the number of characteristics to make it harder

**Twenty Questions.** This is more difficult than Guess the Word. Think of an item and the child is allowed to ask you 20 questions to try and work out what you are thinking of. This helps to generalise the skills worked on in definitions challenge.

**Odd one out.** Present 4 objects, pictures or words, can the child tell you which is the odd one out? Ask them to explain their choice. Choose words that are closer in meaning to make the game harder. E.g. orange, banana, book, apple (easy) or orange, banana, carrot, apple (hard) If you are asking the child to remember a list of items make sure that they are able to remember everything you say.

**Similarities and differences.** Put two pictures down and see if the child can tell you something that is the same about them and then something that is different. E.g. Bicycle and Car – both have wheels but a car has an engine and a bike does not. Make this game harder by choosing words that are very similar in meaning.

**Word Associations.** If you say a word can the child think of an associated word, e.g. “cat” – dog, whiskers or kitten. You could play this game in a group by seeing how far around the circle you could get.

**Opposites.** Can the child think up a word with the opposite meaning to the one that you say. E.g. “Stop” – “Go”.

**Auditory Association.** Can the child extend their opposites skills within more defined categories, e.g. “Mountains are high, valleys are………….(low). A man may be a king, a woman may be ………..(a queen)

**Words with the same/similar meanings (Synonyms).** Give the child a word and see how many words they can think of which have the same or a very similar meaning. E.g. BIG – huge, large, enormous. Talk about the different words and how you might use them.

**Multiple Meanings (Homonyms).** Talk about words that can have more than one meaning, eg. bank, trunk, wave. Can the child make up a sentence for each meaning? Looking at jokes together can be a fun way to explore this area.

**Silly Sentences.** Make up a sentence and ask the child if it makes sense. Can they tell you what is wrong? What could you have said? E.g. “John swam through the mud to the other side of the river.” (water).

**Crosswords.** These can be a fun way to practise thinking of words from definitions.

**Rhyming “I-Spy”.** Give the child a rhyme clue. E.g. “I spy something that sounds like hair.” Chair.

**First sound lists.** Pick a letter and see if the child can think of things from a set of categories for this letter, e.g. “b”, a fruit: “banana”, transport “bus”, job: “builder.” Give the child clues if they cannot think of something by themselves.

**Turn taking alphabet games**. The child has to use the alphabet sequence within their answer. E.g. The Ministers Cat - “The Ministers cat is an angry cat”, “The Ministers cat is a beautiful cat”. Alternatively the adult selects a category and then you take turns to think of items, e.g. Animals – ant, bee, cat etc. This is much harder than simple category games.

**First and Last Sound chaining.** You have to think of a word beginning with the last sound of the word that someone else said, e.g. “cup – paint – teapot – tiger – rabbit – toe – elephant”. This can be made even more difficult by restricting words to a single category e.g. countries.

**If you introduce a time element to these games it will make them more difficult.**

**A child’s performance will be affected by internal and external factors such as noise, stress, being tired or ill.**