

25 Ways to Extend Children's Vocabulary

Activity	What to do	Curriculum links
Read, read and re-read	Books can be used in so many ways to develop language and early literacy skills. Children need to hear the same books again and again to aid their understanding of the language being used and heard as well as a range of new and unfamiliar books. Stories can inspire children's play and extend their knowledge. Be mindful of reading a range of genre and with ambitious vocabulary in context.	Communication and Language Literacy
Sing songs and nursery rhymes	When we sing, we articulate our words more clearly. There are strong connections between singing and spoken words. Encourage children's participation through props and actions and sing every day with young children. You could create a basket of props for daily use.	Communication and Language Literacy Mathematics
Follow children's interests and join in them in their play	Be interested, get down to their level and make eye contact.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Sensory experiences	Providing sensory experiences inside and outside encourages children to express themselves more verbally, learn and understand new vocabulary.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development Expressive Arts and Design
Praise and encourage dialogue, be interested and value what they say (even if incorrectly) and model correct pronunciation and sentences back to children	Never criticize the child's articulation or speech pattern. Showing that you understand what they say can be very encouraging for children.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Add an extra word	As the children speak, add one extra word to their sentence or words they say to increase their vocabulary.	Communication and Language
Story-telling	Use props and puppets and create your own stories. You could include some of their favourite toys or teddies when doing this. Leave puppets and props in provision for children to return to and create their own stories	Communication and Language Literacy Expressive Arts and Design
Commentate or narrate	Commentate and narrate what is going on throughout the day and as they play.	Communication and Language
Ask open-ended questions	As children are playing and exploring ask some open-ended questions such as "How did that happen?" "Why do you think...?" "I wonder what would happen if...?"	Communication and Language
Reduce screen time	Be aware of how much screen time children are having each day both in your setting and at home. Speak with parents and particularly for those children who are very reluctant or unable to communicate well.	Communication and Language Understanding the World

Enhance areas of provision	Enhance areas of provision with items children may not be familiar with. Naming items as children play can help children to hear and absorb new vocabulary.	Communication and Language
Provide enriching experiences	Children are very experiential learners and providing enriching experiences in relation to their Cultural Capital is a great tool for increasing their vocabulary. Trips could include, going to the park, the beach, the library or visiting a fire- station. If visits are not possible there are lots of virtual tours and visits that can be taken online.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development Understanding the World
Invite visitors into your setting (as and when risk assessments allow)	Invite visitors in and encourage children to ask questions. Prepare the children for the visitor coming to give them time to consider and think about what they might like to find out.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development Understanding the World
Pause after speaking to give children opportunity to respond	Children need time for their brain to process and therefore pausing after speaking or asking a question give time for them to respond.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Feely bags	Put known and unknown objects or items into a bag and encourage children to describe it just using their sense of touch. Model first.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development Understanding the World
Pom Pom Avalanche	Trap pom poms in a colander using some wooden sticks or pipe cleaners and turn it upside down. Let the children take turns to pull the sticks out (and strengthen their fine motor skills!) until all of the pom poms fall down like an avalanche!	Communication and Language Physical Development
Paper plate memory game	A variation of the pair matching game. Take several paper plates and markers and write some letters if your children are ready for letter recognition or draw shapes, animals and other items if it's time to build their vocabulary.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
DIY Telephone/ Telephone game	Paint some plastic cups, poke a hole in each of them, and thread string through the bottom. You can experiment with various speaking activities or could ask children to whisper to each other and pass the message around.	Communication and Language
Dance, Freeze, Action	Dance when the music's on and freeze when it stops. Adult to shout an animal, instruction or action for children to do until music comes back on. Also great for an attention and listening.	Communication and Language Physical Development
Story Stones	Story stones are essentially very simple prompts for narrative play. All you need to do is get some flat and smooth stones from a craft shop or a beach and decorate them with pictures of objects or animals. Choose one of the stones and start a tale based on the picture on it, then encourage children to draw more stones and continue the story.	Communication and Language Literacy Expressive Arts and Design
I Spy With My Little Eye	'I Spy' game requiring focus from the little ones and will help to strengthen their vocabular. Can let the children ask questions to encourage discussion, instead of just guessing one word at a time. Model "I spy something in this room which is orange. I spy something which is orange and large..."	Communication and Language Phase 1 Phonics Literacy

Circle time	Circle-time in small groups is a great opportunity to model a sentence and give each child the opportunity to speak about a topic which they can relate to. If this activity is done frequently and children know they are under no pressure to speak, children will grow in confidence in contributing.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Karaoke / Performing Area	Provide a stage/ pallet and microphone and encourage children to perform nursery rhymes or songs for their friends	Communication and Language Expressive Arts and Design
Provide a communication friendly space	An enclosed, cosy space or den will encourage talk. Provide these inside and outside to promote Communication and Language.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development
Provide non-fiction books near areas which will contextualise them	Provide non-fiction books, for example outdoors provide books about minibeasts and things they might see to support their learning.	Communication and Language Literacy Understanding the World
Loose Parts	By providing loose parts and items which are open-ended children will be more imaginative with their play	Communication and Language Mathematics
Give children time to play	When children have longer periods of uninterrupted play, they have more opportunity to engage in deep level learning and will increase their opportunity for language development.	Communication and Language Personal, Social and Emotional Development