

## WORD FINDING PROBLEMS

### What are they?

A word-finding problem is the inability to recall an intended word. For some children, this problem may be severe enough to impair their ability to communicate effectively.

### Characteristics

A child with word-find problems may do some or all of the following:

- overuse non-specific words  
(e.g., "thing", "stuff", "something", "somewhere")
- use many "filler" words such as, "uh", "ah", "um", "well", "er", like"
- circumlocute (beat around the bush). For example:  
"I went to that big place where they have those big red trucks that shoot water."
- use a definition or description of a word instead of the intended word  
(e.g. "pusher stick" for "ski pole" or "prickly plant" for "cactus")
- substitute a word with a similar meaning for the intended word  
(e.g., "tiger" for "lion", "pin" for "needle")
- Use a word which sounds similar to the intended word  
(e.g., "cage" for "cave", "television" for "telephone")
- use a very "general" verb in place of a more specific one  
(e.g., "got a fish" for "caught a fish", "put flowers in the dirt" for "planted")
- frequently use long pauses. For example:  
"I went to the [pause] drugstore to buy [pause] some, some [pause] tooth things".

## STRATEGIES FOR WORD-FINDING PROBLEMS

There are at least three ways to help:

- A. Show the child more efficient ways of storing or categorizing words so that they will be easier to recall later on.
- B. Help the child to improve his/her speed and accuracy of word retrieval through various typed of naming tasks.
- C. Show the child certain retrieval cues ("tricks" and "hints") which will help him to retrieve a given word during moments when he is "stuck".

## Implications

Word-finding difficulties may create several problems for the child, including:

- troubles expressing ideas, describing experiences and events, or participating in discussions.
- problems explaining word meanings.
- troubles retrieving information to answer questions in class or on tests.

At times, frustration felt by the child when unable to find specific words may cause him to:

- lose his idea
- change the topic
- invent fictitious stories
- become fidgety or overactive
- stare vacantly or become silent

## Improving the organization and storage of words in the child's "mental dictionary"

We do this because it is much easier to find something when we have stored it in an organized fashion. Suggested activities include:

### **A. Association Tasks**

- naming opposites e.g., big - (small), happy - (sad)
- naming synonyms e.g., tell me another word for mad
- naming items associated with a place  
e.g., name three things we find at the zoo, name three things we find in a bedroom
- naming items associated with a specific time  
e.g., name three things we do at Christmas, name three things we do in the summer
- naming actions that go with a certain object/person  
e.g., what *special thing* does a bird do? [flies]  
what *special thing* can we do with a ball [roll, bounce]
- naming object/people that go with a certain action  
e.g., what are three things we can ride? what are three things we can catch?

### **B. Categorization Tasks**

- matching a word to its appropriate category  
e.g. Is an apple a fruit or a vegetable? Which of these is a fruit? -apple, hotdog, carrot
- completion of categories - have the child add more items to the ones you have started  
e.g., apple, orange, peach ...[child adds more]
- labelling categories e.g., apple, orange, peach - What are these?
- which one doesn't belong (and why?) e.g., apple, carrot, orange, peach
- generation of categories e.g., name all the fruits you can
- talking about differences e.g., summer & winter -how are these different?
- talking about similarities e.g., car and bus - how are these the same?

## C: Working on Describing Objects/ Activities

This will help us teach children to describe objects/activities using specific questions to help themselves in a situation where they might not be able to find the right word. In some cases, the question may not be helpful or have an answer. Some predictable questions may be:

- a. What kind of item/ activity is it? (It is an animal? It is something you do in the summer)
- b. What does it look like? (It is big, black and white, striped?); You do it near the water
- c. What do you do with it? (You can dig and make something with sand)
- d. Where do you find it? (At the zoo or jungle; Somewhere warm)
- e. How does it feel or How does it make you feel? (Not sure; Happy because it was warm and sunny)

## Cues To Help Word Retrieval

After a child has tried unsuccessfully to find a word without cues, presenting a specific retrieval cue may help. These strategies can also be learned by the individual and used to self cue a word. The following types of cues may be used to facilitate recall and retrieval from long-term memory.

### 1. Phonetic Cues:

- a) Say the beginning sound of the intended word, as in saying "b" to elicit the word *ball*.
- b) Say a part of the word, such as one or two syllables, as in saying "hippo" to elicit *hippopotamus*
- c) Give a rhyming word cue, such as reciting "sing", "wing" to help the recall of an intended word such as *ring*
- d) Show the placement of the structures of the mouth for the beginning of the sound intended, as in pursing the lips for the *sh*-sound to elicit the word *show*

### 2. Association Cues:

- a) Use antonyms to facilitate the recall and retrieval of their direct opposites, as in saying "The opposite of night is \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit *day*
- b) Use synonyms as cue words, as in saying "Another word for lady is \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the word *woman*
- c) Use an associated word which belongs to the same semantic class as a cue, as in saying "Bread and \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the word *butter*
- d) Use the name of a general conceptual category to elicit the name of a member of the group, as in saying "you can eat it for dinner", "It's an insect", "You can play with it", "You can use it to fix things", "It's a building"
- e) Use serial cueing, as in reciting part of a well-established series such as, "Tuesday, Wednesday, \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit *Thursday*

### 3. Sentence Completion:

- a) Use sentences completion with a well-known and established sentences pattern such as "We set the \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the word *table*; or "We gave her a birthday \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the word *present*
- b) Give a nursery rhyme completion, using a well-established nursery rhyme such as "Humpty Dumpty sat on a \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the word *wall*
- c) Present a metaphor or a simile, such as "As white as \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the words such as *snow* or "It was music to my \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit the intended word *ears*
- d) Use proverb cueing, as in saying "All that glitters is not \_\_\_\_\_" to elicit *gold*

### 4. Multiple Choice Cueing

Provide multiple choices as in saying "Is it a house, a tree, or a chair?" to elicit the word *tree*