



Speech and Language Therapy Department

# Supporting Language Skills in a Child with a Visual Impairment

## Activities for Receptive and Expressive Vocabulary

All the activities below are for learning useful vocabulary both in class, around school and at home. Children with visual impairments can often have difficulty understanding the meaning of words as they don't have visual referents.

Often children use words expressively but do not always understand the meaning behind it as they lack vision which enables children to incidentally learn about the function, use, and context of a range of language forms including verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc. Therefore the following activities are beneficial in supporting development of word meanings, word associations, word categories and the physical properties of objects.

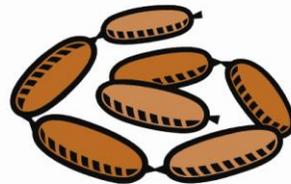
Possible school vocabulary could be around self-care, classroom equipment, current class topic, storybooks, and curriculum areas such as PE, numeracy or science. The success of the activity depends on careful choice of vocabulary based on the words the child will hear and need to learn and use.

## Receptive Vocabulary Activities

### Nouns (objects/ names/animals)

#### Object Selection

- Put some objects (not more than 6) out on the table, naming them as you do so.
- Say the name of one object (but don't point to or touch it!) and the child has to find it and post it into a box (to make it more fun).



Repeat with the other objects.

- Start with fewer objects if the child finds it too hard. Instead of posting the object you could practice the below activities:

## Expressive Vocabulary Activities

Games to help a child use words expressively - 'say them'

- Select some objects and name them all individually.
- Put them on the table upside down or in a bag.
- The child selects an object and names it.
- If they don't name it, give a 'forced alternative' 'Is it a banana or an apple?' This may help the child name it.

If they still have difficulty give the first sound of the object (sound not letter) it's a bb ... (banana)

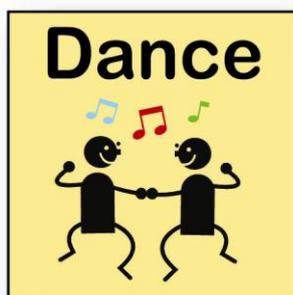
Other rewarding activities to encourage a child to name things:  
During pretend tea party direct the child to tell you what items to give to a doll and/or teddy

## Activities for Understanding and Using Verbs

Most of the activities for receptive and expressive vocabulary above can be adapted easily for developing verb vocabulary. Instead of nouns use verbs, for example, 'sitting', 'running' or asking 'what's he doing? Teddy's s ...'. As with noun vocabulary it is obviously important to target verbs that will be useful and that are frequently used in the classroom and at home.

Here are some activities suitable for understanding and using verbs.

- Tell your child to make their teddy follow your instructions - use fun activities like Simon Says- make teddy walk, run, jump, dance etc. Get your child to engage these actions.



Put out a set of objects and ask simple questions:

- Which one flies? (bird) Which one do you drink out of (cup) etc.?
- Find as many opportunities as possible for use of the targeted verbs in everyday school and home experience.

## Activities for Linking Words Together: Simple Category and Description work

The activities above will develop the child's vocabulary, however to bring out the full meaning and usefulness of words they need to be linked to other words—almost like a filing cabinet in the child's brain—the more knowledge the child has for words the easier they are to access. The following activities will help to develop this vocabulary knowledge.

### Equipment

If the child has limited or no vision it helps to have items that represent common categories e.g. the food category can be represented by foil packaging, transport – represented by a wheel, animals – represented by soft material - fur.



You will also need a number of objects for each category. At times it will be difficult to have real life or miniature objects for larger or more abstract nouns e.g. elephant/emotions – therefore tapes/CD's of animal sounds / everyday sounds / emotions can be used and the child must label and categorise these accordingly.

Start with a small number of objects/sounds from just two categories. As the child progresses and is able to sort items into two categories introduce more objects/sounds and further categories.

## Naming and sorting items/sub categories (smaller categories for example the sub categories of FOOD are fruit, vegetables, savoury, sweet etc.

Put the objects in a pile/in a bag (vegetables, fruit, savoury snacks) etc. The child takes a food item and names the item. Ask the child what group the item is in, is it a type of fruit, vegetable, savoury snack etc.

## Odd one out

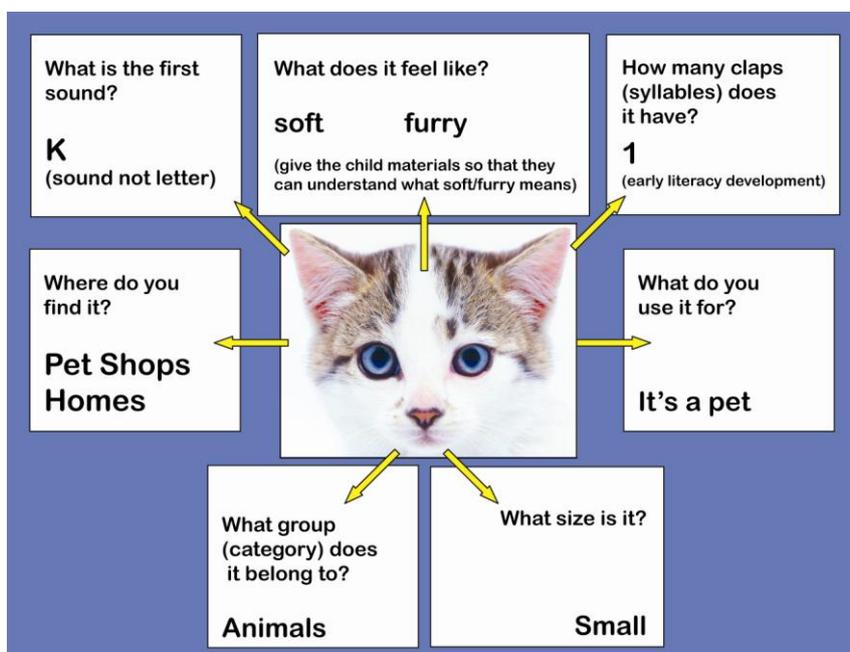
Place 3 objects in front of the child: 2 objects from the same category and 1 object from a different category (Pear, Carrot, Apple).

Can the child find the odd one out and explain their choice? e.g. 'these are both the same as they are fruits but this a vegetable.'

## Describing game

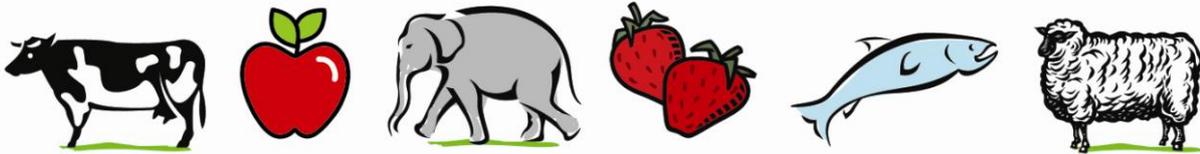
Choose 1 object. Work through the describing cards (next page) one by one and talk about the item and all its different properties / functions.

## Describing hints

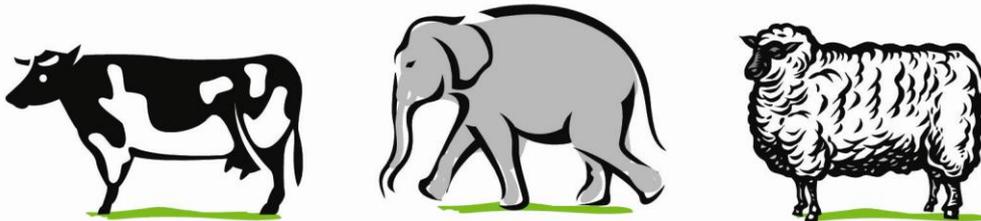


## Elimination Game

- Put 6 objects in front of the child (e.g., 3 food and 3 animals).
- Give clues about the objects so that the child takes away objects, which do not match your clue.
- They should be left with one object at the end, e.g.



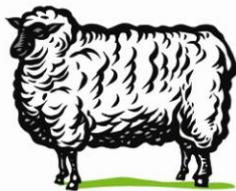
I'm thinking of an animal



This animal lives on a farm.



This animal has wool



## Making groups

- Choose 3-6 items from each category.
- Ask the child to put them in groups. The aim of this activity is for the child to do the activity independently, can they use their knowledge of categories to 'problem solve' how to group the items?
- Spread the objects out in front of the child.
- Start with a small number of objects from just two categories. As the child progresses and is able to sort items into two categories introduce more objects from different categories.
- Once they have sorted the objects go through them together. Can the child name all the items and explain to you why they have put them together in a group? Can they name additional items in that group?

## Importantly...

When working with visually impaired children it is important to use concrete language rather than vague terms.

For example, it's very difficult for a child to understand where you are referring to when you say 'it's over there', rather they would be able to follow concrete language instruction 'the ball is beside the door'.

Where possible allow the visually impaired child to explore different objects within class or at home with their hands e.g. helping unload shopping bags – describing the different food groups, their texture (furry peach, prickly pineapple etc.), and labelling where you store them (milk in fridge, cereal in the cupboard).

Please contact the speech and language therapy department at ChildVision if you require any additional information on language development in children with a visual impairment

Speech and Language Therapy Department

ChildVision

Grace Park Road

Drumcondra

Dublin 9.

Tel: 01-8373635



[www.childvision.ie](http://www.childvision.ie)