

Birth to Five

INTRODUCING NOVEL WORDS TO OLDER INFANTS AND TODDLERS

One important way to extend and improve the quality of conversations with older infants and toddlers is to introduce them to new and interesting words that will grow their receptive language skills and vocabularies. This takes planning and intentionality.

Strategies for introducing a broad vocabulary of meaningful words

Identify new, interesting, and playful words:

- Brainstorm with colleagues and the children's families for words that relate to the children's home lives and the program's routines and play experiences.
- Consult children's books, poems, songs, chants, rhymes, and finger plays for rich vocabulary words and word play.
- Use a dictionary or thesaurus to find alternative words for children's routines and play experiences (nap, rest, and sleep, for example).
- Identify words in the children's home languages and in English.

Communicate within the context of a warm relationship:

- Make interactions nondirective and personal.
- Be responsive to what the child needs and is learning.
- Be an active listener; wait for the child's response. Then respond to what you think the child is trying to tell you (both verbally and nonverbally), and fill in non-specific phrases with rich vocabulary.
- Be aware of words and concepts that a child understands and build on these with new and interesting words.

Provide a vocabulary-rich environment:

- Offer a stimulating environment that invites young children to actively explore and inspires conversations.
- Select words that are useful in everyday interactions and experiences.
- Expose older infants and toddlers to interesting and novel words when talking to them during routines and play experiences.
- Use rich vocabulary when responding to children's facial expressions, gestures, body language, and vocalizations.