

Word Finding Difficulties

What is it?

The best way to define a word-finding problem is to think how you feel when you can't remember someone's name or the name of a place you've visited. It's that "tip of the tongue" feeling that we all experience occasionally.

How is it different to vocabulary difficulties?

Delayed or immature vocabulary is when a child does not know the word for something – it may be that they have not experienced that particular object/situation before and so have never heard the word. A child with word-finding difficulties, however, does know the word but cannot retrieve it quickly or accurately.

Why is it a problem?

If we all experience it, why is it a problem? People with word finding difficulties experience more problems than you would expect. They may become frustrated or embarrassed, particularly if they have a tendency to replace the word they are searching for with one which is not correct.

How can I recognise a word-finding problem?

They may present in three ways:

- 1. Accuracy.** The person may use words which don't quite fit what s/he is trying to say, or ones which don't fit at all.
- 2. Delayed response time.** The person may take longer than usual to reply or to find a word.
- 3. Substitutions.** The person could replace the word they are searching for with another one, which has a similar meaning.

4. Non-verbal information

Gestures or mimes may be used in an attempt to tell you the word. The person may also have a mannerism, which s/he uses when experiencing word-finding problems.

Some people tap their feet or the table; some look down or break eye contact. This can help you to recognise that they are having difficulties finding a word.

Examples of how word-finding difficulties may present:

- Replacing the word with another one which looks/smells/feels the same, e.g. 'apple' for 'cherry'.
- Correcting themselves constantly – “no that’s not it . . . “, “I mean...”
- Hesitating while they think of the right word.
- Non-specific words may be used, eg “thingy”.
- They may use descriptions, “you know, the one that goes in there . . . “
- They may get some of the sounds wrong, e.g. ‘camperlater’ for ‘calculator’, ‘faroot’ for ‘flute’.
- They may simply say they don’t know, when in fact they do.

Ways to help

| Encourage the child to... | Useful strategies for the adult to use.... |
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| Ask for repetition | Give them more time to answer |
| Signal if they need more time | Can they say it another way? |
| Say when they don’t understand a word | Encourage them to draw it, show, write it down... |
| Signal when they are stuck | Encourage the child to name the word rather than using ‘empty’ words such as ‘this’, ‘thingy’ etc |
| Ask for clues, e.g. “can you tell me the first sound?” | Encourage child to tell you something about it. What does it begin with? What does it look like? |

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| Use clues independently, e.g. thinking of the first sound, or thinking of useful information about the word. | If they are really stuck, give them 'cues'. It begins with a c..., it lives on a farm... |
| Identify useful things they are already doing, e.g. "you said it had numbers on it, and then that helped you to think of the word calculator" | Encourage them to find out, look it up (use word book, dictionary, computer) |