

## Word Finding Difficulties

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:

**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.

**Delayed response time.** The person may take longer than usual to reply or to find a word.

**Substitutions.** The person could replace the word they are searching for with another one, which has a similar meaning.

**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...**

- Ask for repetition
- Signal if they need more time
- Say when they don’t understand a word
- Signal when they are stuck
- Ask for clues, e.g. “can you tell me the first sound?”
- Use clues independently, e.g. thinking of the first sound, or thinking of useful information about the word.
- 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”

#### **Useful strategies for the adult to use....**

- Give them more time to answer – have a think about it and I will come back to you.
- Can they say it another way?
- Encourage them to draw it, show, write it down
- Encourage the child to name the word rather than using “empty” words such as “this”, “thingy” etc.
- Encourage child to tell you something about it.
- What does it begin with? What does it look like?
- If they are really stuck, give them “cues”. It begins with a c..., it lives on a farm...
- Encourage them to find out, look it up (use word book, dictionary, computer)