



# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Understanding Word-Retrieval Problems

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retrieval from other speech and language skills. A child may struggle to say a word for many different reasons. Perhaps he/she lacks prior knowledge of the word or is having difficulty pronouncing it. The child may be too shy to say the word, or too distracted. The SLP will use a variety of observations and assessments to decide whether word retrieval is a true problem. This typically includes measuring expressive and receptive vocabulary (words we know and can say), observing conversation, and evaluating narrative skills (telling a story).



### What Can I Do to Help My Child?

The following listening, thinking, and speaking activities can help children who have difficulty retrieving words they already know. Note: these activities do not teach new vocabulary.

- Give a visual cue such as a picture or gesture. If the visual cue doesn't help, try an auditory clue (the first sound is..., it rhymes with..., it goes with...).
- Encourage the child to use words he/she knows well to promote confidence in speaking.
- Play games that require naming photos, such as a photo lotto game.
- Don't let the child struggle for too long to "find" or recall a word. Give the child the word he/she is looking for after a few seconds. Then, after the child finishes his/her thought, provide an additional verbal cue to help the child remember or practice the word again.
- Read books that contain rhymes, opposites, classifications, animals, names, repetitions, and predictable text.
- Use "cloze" activities that ask the child to recognize contextual meaning. For example,

Have you ever found yourself unable to remember a specific word—a word you normally know well—in the middle of a conversation? You might remember something about the word, such as the sound it starts with or whether it's a long or short word. When this happens, you may feel like the word is "on the tip of your tongue."

Children and adults with language disorders may struggle more frequently to find words, which can cause frustration and interfere with communication. When a word-finding—or word-retrieval—problem affects daily communication, it can also impact academics, social communication, and self-esteem.



### How Do I Know If My Child Has Word-Retrieval Problems?

Adults can often tell a speech-language pathologist (SLP) when they are having trouble finding words. For children, however, word-retrieval problems can be difficult to diagnose. It is nearly impossible to separate the skill of word



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(cont.)

- ask the child to complete the sentence: "I gave my teacher the \_\_\_ I did the night before."  
(homework)
- Tell simple riddles and knock-knock jokes.
  - Play timed games: Name all the (sports, colors, tools, vegetables, movies, fruits, games, states) you can in one minute. (This must be age-appropriate.)
  - Play category naming games: "Giraffes, lions, and elephants are all..." (zoo animals). "Sink, toilet, tub, and towel are all..." (bathroom items).
  - Play association games: "Shoes go with \_\_\_."
  - Play opposites naming games: "The opposite of night is \_\_\_."
  - Play synonym naming games: "Cold is the same as \_\_\_." (Chilly or another word that means the same.)
  - Have the child identify what comes next: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, \_\_\_."
  - Play word games that transform verbs into nouns: "If I teach, I am a \_\_\_."
- If you suspect your child has difficulty retrieving words he/she knows, contact a local speech-language pathologist. An SLP can assess and help determine if your child has word finding difficulties and can offer treatment activities specific to his/her needs.

### **Related Handy Handouts®:**

[149 – Vocabulary Development](#)

[371 – Are My Child's Language Skills Developing Normally](#)

[380 – Help Students Develop Strong Vocabulary Skills](#)

### Resources

- Tutorial: Word Retrieval and Word Retrieval Problems. Retrieved November 1, 2008, from [http://www.bianys.org/learnnet/tutorials/word\\_retrieval\\_problems.html](http://www.bianys.org/learnnet/tutorials/word_retrieval_problems.html)
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- Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders. Retrieved November 1, 2008, from <http://www.oafccd.com/factsheet/fact50.htm>
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