

Handy Handouts®

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Strengthen Your Core: Core Vocabulary and How to Teach It

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What is it?

Vocabulary can be divided into two groups—**core vocabulary** and **fringe vocabulary**.

Core Vocabulary:



- Refers to the 200 high-frequency words that make up 80% of what we say
- Consists of pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions
- Can be used in multiple contexts
- Gives the speaker the ability to use different communication functions, such as protesting, describing, requesting, asking questions, and commenting
- Examples include “I, help, want, in, more, stop, eat, look, put”

Fringe Vocabulary:



- Is specific to a situation or person
- Consist mostly of nouns
- Typically allows a person to label objects
- Examples include “phone, car, dog, flower, pencil, shirt”

Why Is It Important?

Core words are essential to language production. Without them, a person cannot form a sentence. Try using the fringe words “park” and “kids” to make a sentence. Core words, such as “in” and “play” are needed to make a sentence—“Kids play in the park.” If only taught fringe vocabulary (i.e., animals, food, clothing), a child will have difficulty truly communicating his or her wants, needs, and ideas.



How Do You Teach Core Words?

Core words might seem difficult to teach. Words like “big, it, need, have” are not easily made into a symbol or picture. Modeling is key to teaching core words. Whether verbally or with a communication device, the child needs to hear the core word repeatedly and in different contexts to learn the word.

What is a Core Word Board?

Core word boards are a type of communication device or visual that contain core words and their visual representations. The size of the board and number of words on the board can vary, but the board allows for easy modeling of the words. The speech language pathologist, parent, teacher, etc., can say and point to the core words, allowing the child to hear and see the word being modeled.

This free core word board and others are available from Saltillo. (<https://saltillo.com/chatcorner/content/29>)

wordpower 88 Location- TELL ME Core Board

what ?	where 📍	mother 👩	father 👨	sister 👧	brother 👦	girl 👧	boy 👦	head 👤	hand 👋	feet 👣
I 👤	me 👤	who 👤	friend 👤👤	now 🕒	later 🕒	today ☀️	same 🟦🟦	diff'rnt 🟦🟠	big 📏	little 📏
my/mine 👤	is / am are	to ➡️	first 📅	next 📅	last 📅	all gone 🗑️	ready 👉	busy 👤👤	happy 😊	sad 😞
it 📄	can 👉	have 👤	come 👤	feel 😊	know 👤	give 👤👉	angry-mad 😡	messy 👤👤	good 👍	bad 👎
you 👤👤	do 👉	eat 👤🍴	drink 👤🥤	finish 👤📄	get 👤📄	sing 👤🎵	that 👉	a the	and +	more 👤👤
your 👤👤	don't-not X	go ➡️	help 👤👉	open 👤📄	put 👤📄	see 👁️	again ↺️	in 📄	away 👉	on 💡
here 📄	there 👤👤	like 😊	play 👤👤	read 👤📄	stop STOP	walk 👤	show 👤👉	out 👉	up ↑	off 💡
yes 😊	no X	want 👤👉	take 👤📄	tell 👤👉	turn ↻️	watch 👤👉	write 👤📄	front 👉	down ↓	with 👉

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What Core Words Should You Teach?

When choosing core words to teach or model, you should consider:



1. the activity being done
2. the communication functions needed
 - o If having a snack, choose core words that can be used to request ("want, more, help") and/or direct ("open, all done").
 - o If playing with modeling clay, choose core words that can be used to describe ("big, little, feel").

Begin by modeling the core word verbally, with a core word board, and on a communication device if the child uses one. For example, model the core word "open" when a child needs a snack opened. Then, gradually add to it by modeling "help open" or "open it."

Core Words in Action

Core words may seem overwhelming at first. Below are some common activities and examples of core words and phrases that can be used. Many of the words and phrases can be used in each activity. Try picking one or two words or a phrase to target during the activity. Remember to model as much as possible.

Blocks



- **Single core words:** "put, on, up, down, help, play"
- **Core word phrases:** "put on, go up, my turn, want more, get more, give me more"
- **Core + Fringe phrases:** "more blocks, blocks fall down, put on top, I like blocks"

Cars



- **Single core words:** "go, stop, fast, turn, have"
- **Core word phrases:** "go fast, look out, slow down, turn fast"
- **Core + Fringe phrases:** "fast car, car turns, turn right, see cars, open door, car goes fast, stop car"



Dolls



- **Single core words:** "on, off, put, want, you, I, eat, drink"
- **Core word phrases:** "put on, take off, you put on, drink more, I play"
- **Core + Fringe phrases:** "hat off, more clothes, baby eats, baby sleeps, put on shoes, want bottle"

Modeling Clay



- **Single core words:** "push, open, feel, big, little, make, like"
- **Core word phrases:** "open it, want more, put in, push down, your turn, clean up"
- **Core + Fringe phrases:** "big ball, feels soft, little snake, make cookie, open jar, close jar"

Snack/Meals



- **Single core words:** "more, all done, good, bad, eat, drink, help"
- **Core word phrases:** "more please, no more, eat more, help open, want more, I eat"
- **Core + Fringe phrases:** "want pizza, I need milk, taste good, give me candy, put in trash"

Resources:

- "Core Words." Fluent AAC. Accessed 3/1/2023. <https://www.fluentaac.com/core-words>
- "Fringe Words." Fluent AAC. Accessed 3/1/2023. <https://www.fluentaac.com/fringe-words>
- Cannon, Barbara C., and Edmond, Grace. "A Few Good Words Using Core Vocabulary to Support Nonverbal Students." *The ASHA Leader* 14, no 5 (2009). Accessed 3/1/2023. https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/leader.FTR4.14052009.20?utm_source=TrendMD&utm_medium=pc&utm_campaign=The_ASHA_Leader_TrendMD_0
- "Lite-tech Communication Board Options." Saltillo. Accessed 3/1/2023. <https://salttillo.com/chatcorner/content/29>
- Marden, Jennifer. "Teaching with Core Words: Building Blocks for Communication and Curriculum." *Communication Matters* 29, no. 1 (April 2015): 24–25. Accessed 3/1/2023, <https://communicationmatters.org.uk/research/journals/#cm-journal>.

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