

What will the speech and language therapist do?

The speech and language therapist will be able to identify if a child has a word finding difficulty as part of their assessment of the child's language skills.

An intervention may be recommended to help support the child to store vocabulary effectively. When we learn words, we create links between other words that we know, based on meaning. This then creates a network of words which are 'filed' in our brains alongside other words which are associated. Developing the following skills will be essential:

- categorisation skills
- defining and describing familiar words
- understanding words which have similar meanings
- word retrieval tasks
- support to learn new vocabulary
- support to develop strategies to aid word finding difficulties.

Find out more information at www.ican.org.uk

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The information in this leaflet is available in additional languages and alternative formats. Please contact the Trust for further details.

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Word finding difficulty



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What is a word finding difficulty?

A word finding (or word retrieval) difficulty is a problem retrieving words which a person knows. It happens to all of us at some point, we can't think of a word that we definitely know. This happens regularly for children with word finding difficulties (and other expressive language difficulties) and it can significantly disrupt the fluency of what a child is saying and can also lead to the child becoming frustrated.

Children with word finding difficulties may:

- take a long time to think of a word they want to use
- produce long and rambling sentences, talking around the subject, without generating the specific words
- use phrases such as “you know” a lot
- over use of ‘empty’ vocabulary, such as “thing” or “stuff”
- produce words which sound similar to the target word e.g. “calendar” for calculator
- produce words which are linked to the target word e.g. “telescope” for binoculars
- invent highly descriptive words to describe something e.g. “bouncing object” for trampoline
- use strategies to compensate, such as gesture, show a picture, describe the word they are thinking of, think of a word that has a similar meaning.

What causes a word finding difficulty?

A word finding difficulty is not caused by limited vocabulary. In fact, children often have quite a wide vocabulary and they regularly experience difficulties retrieving words. It is often associated with a wider expressive language difficulty.

What can I do to help a person with a word finding difficulty?

There are lots of ways adults can help support a child with a word finding difficulty:

- it is really important to give the child additional time to think about the words they want to use. Try to give them your full attention and not rush them
- ask the child to show you (they can gesture, draw or find a picture) if you are not sure of the word they are trying to retrieve
- stay interested and tell them you really want to know what it is they are trying to think of
- ask the child if they can tell you something about the word e.g. what it looks like, where you find it etc
- see if they can think of a similar word
- if you think you know what the word is that the child is trying to think of, give them the first sound of the word. This can prompt them to retrieve the correct word.

