

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Parenting: Improving Your Child's Vocabulary

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Mutryce Williams **July 20, 2016**



Family

We live in an age of texting and social media. We live in an age where abbreviated or transformed vocabulary and spelling have become the norm. Proposals have been made to adjust the school/learning environment in order to accommodate the new generation as they are living in this new age and are technology savvy; will this eventually mean butchering or grossly amending the English language to accommodate the new trends in vocabulary and spelling as well? Would educators have to go back to school to learn how to decipher this new language? I can't help but wonder, and as a parent it scares me. This is the motivation behind this issue of Navigating "Island" Parenting.

A strong vocabulary helps to foster understanding, communication, and reading ability.

We have heard repeatedly that the basis of a lifelong love and talent for learning is a solid vocabulary. We have been told that vocabulary is extremely important to children's development. According to Dr. Nell Duke, the co-author of "Reading & Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades: Research-Based Practices," the research has shown that children who possess larger vocabularies have higher school achievement and higher reading achievement, as vocabulary plays a fundamental role in the reading process and contributes greatly to a reader's comprehension.

According to the Kumon Learning Center (2012) having a good breadth of vocabulary is critical to ensuring that children can express themselves in an articulate and clear manner in both their oral and written communications. Additionally The Children's Trust (2015) states that children who have a good grasp of vocabulary are able to give more in-depth responses to the texts they read. They are also able to contribute more easily to classroom discussions and use more precise vocabulary in their written work. The research and support for a strong vocabulary exists. As parents, we often wonder how we can play an active role in improving our children's vocabulary and spelling. Here are a few suggestions.

Suggestions for Improving Your Child's Vocabulary and Spelling Skills

There are many ways to help your child improve his or her vocabulary and spelling.

? Read-There is a strong correlation between reading, vocabulary and spelling. A voracious reader seldom encounters difficulty with spelling. Reading is also very important as the English language is quite complex. There are words that share the same pronunciation but have a different meaning and spelling. These words are called homonyms. Here are a few examples (hear, hair, hare, and here; fear, fare, fair; bear, bare, beer, bier; there, their; stair, stare; heel, heal; peace, piece; know, no; knows, nose; flower, flour, male, mail; week, pair, pear; weak, waive, wave; waste, waist; sore, soar; slay, scent, cent, sent; hour, our; sleigh and read, red). A child who is not well read or a child who does not possess a strong command of the English language will encounter difficulty in making the distinction between these words. This is why reading is highly encouraged.

? In addressing the complexity of the English language, it is important to inform your child that some of the literature he or she may encounter may have varied spelling. This depends on the origin of the literature, that is whether it is American or as we say the Queen's English; an example of such as word is honor (American) and honour (Queen's English). Help your child identify other words such as (center, centre; and color, colour). Help him or her identify the word that is appropriate for his or her learning/academic environment.

? Read to your child daily. When your child is able to read, have him or her read independently. Ask your child to read books out loud, so that you can assist with pronunciation or provide clarification on the meaning of words that he or she may not comprehend. Make reading a daily part of your family's routine.

? Provide your child with literature that is more advanced than his or her reading level. Set reading goals for your child.

? Encourage your child to write and speak in proper or Standard English. Many children tend to spell and write the way they speak. Some words that I have encountered are (enough, enuff; rough, ruff; tough, tuff; thought, taught; caught, cart; complement, compliment; cupboard, cubbud; finally, finely; good, well; wha mek, why; miner, minor; friend, fren and here, hay). I support the local vernacular as it has its cultural roots. It is a crucial part of one's identity; however we are very much aware that this is not the universally acceptable standard for oral or written communication.

? Writing is a great way to improve spelling. Give your child a spelling journal. Dictate words for him or her to spell. You may also narrate stories. Ask your child to write the narrated stories in his or her spelling journal. Ask your child to write a letter to a relative or friend. Ask him or her to write an essay about his day or a field trip that he or she may have taken. Correct the work. Continually assess areas for improvement. Make a list of commonly misspelt/misspelled words and have your child practice the spelling.

? Restrict television watching and talk to your child often. Although some television programs may have educational components, your child cannot have a conversation with the television. The research has indicated that the number of words a child hears in his or her early years is strongly predictive of future vocabulary growth, so talk with your child. It is important to note that although the research indicates that the number of words a child hears in early years is strongly predictive of future vocabulary growth, this is not predestined. A child's vocabulary may improve if certain steps are taken such as exposure to an array of books and other literature. This is why reading is highly encouraged.

? When talking to your child, speak as if you are talking to an adult. Do not change your choice of words. Be prepared to provide the meaning to words that your child may not comprehend.

? Play games involving vocabulary such as Scrabble, Boggle, Charades, Hangman and Word Search. Play sight and rhyming games as well.

? A dictionary and a thesaurus are two important vocabulary and spelling tools. There are technological and other 'smart' devices which are designed to assist with spelling and vocabulary, however my preference is a printed or hard copy of the dictionary and thesaurus.

Parenting Quotes

"A parent's love is whole no matter how many times divided." Anonymous

"If you think that being a parent requires a limitless amount of patience. You are wrong. You require more than that." Anonymous

"Don't allow anything in your life that you don't want reproduced in your children." Anonymous

“Parents are teachers, guides, leaders, protectors and providers for their children.” Iyanla Vanzant

“You didn’t have a choice about the parents you inherited, but you do have a choice about the kind of parent you will be.” Marian Wright Edelman

Recommended Reading for Children

Wise Guy-The Life and Philosophy of Socrates by M.D Usher Pictures by William Bramhall

Children of History-Ghandi by Brenda Clarke Illustrated by Roger Payne

Hooray for Inventors by Marcia Williams – Includes more than 100 Brilliant Inventions that Changed the World.

Recommended Reading for the Parent

What Every 21st Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today’s Challenges with Wisdom and Heart by Debra W. Haffner