

Tip Sheet: Use Child-Friendly Definitions for New Vocabulary

FOR PRESCHOOL PARENTS

For additional support on this topic, visit <https://bit.ly/QTDefine> to view a short video.

WHY?

High-quality children’s books use sophisticated vocabulary. These words add richness to the story, but can sometimes make it hard for children to understand the book. Pausing while you’re reading to explain what a word means can help your child better understand what is happening in the story. It also helps them learn new words to develop their vocabularies. Children with rich vocabularies tend to do better in school.

WHAT?

One way to help your child develop a rich vocabulary is by using child-friendly definitions to explain unfamiliar words. A **child-friendly definition** uses simple everyday language to explain what a word means. They are different from dictionary definitions, which can be difficult for children to understand. For example, here are two definitions for the word *produce*:

- Dictionary definition: to compose, create, or bring out by intellectual or physical effort
- Child-friendly definition: When someone *produces* something, it means they make it.

Here are a few more examples of child-friendly definitions for sophisticated words:

- A **container** is a place to put things.
- When you **sprint**, you run very fast for a short time.
- When someone is **clever**, they are very smart and have good ideas.
- When you do something **deliberately**, you do it on purpose.

HOW?

Here’s how you can use child-friendly definitions as you read a book to your child:

- As you are reading, think about the language the author is using. Ask yourself which words might be difficult for your child to understand.
- Pause while reading the book to talk to your child about the word. Ask them what they think it means.
- Respond to your child’s ideas and clarify and misunderstandings.
- Be careful with the amount of words you choose to define. Too many could make it hard for your child to follow what is happening in the story. Explain words that are important to understanding the story or words that your child asks about.

Here’s an example of what it might sound like:

- Parent: “Here it said that the boy **sprinted** out the door. What do you think **sprinted** means?”
- Child: “He ran.”
- Parent: “Yes, he ran! When you **sprint**, you run very fast for just a short time.”