

Word games to play at home

General fun games that support vocabulary

Simple games to start with

These simpler games can be used with all ages but are suited to younger children in particular.

Treasure hunt

This is a great one for the journey to and from school. When outside go looking for things such as:

- Objects that could be described by a particular word such as 'gorgeous' or 'shrivelled'.
- Categories such as mini-beasts or things that need electricity, or things that are circular.
- Particular plants or insects such as 'vines' or 'ladybirds'.

Draw, write or take photographs of these objects if you can, but above all talk about them.

Category call out

On the bus or in the car, think of a category. You can choose any topic but here are some ideas for inspiration: 'living things', 'things with wheels', 'things with circles' or 'things made of metal'. Work as a team to see how many things you can see in a set time, such as two minutes. Next time see if you can beat your previous total.

I went shopping

This game is good for developing memory, so is good for adults too. One person starts by saying, "I went shopping and I bought a ..." (names a food item). The second player says, "I went shopping and I bought ..." and repeats the first player's item before adding their own. The third player continues, saying the first two items before adding their own. And so on. See how many you can remember. A variation of this game is: "I went on holiday and I packed ..."

Word of the day

Select a word for the day and write it somewhere everyone can see. This will work well with words that are sent home from school. Everyone then tries to use the word in a sentence as often as possible. The sentences must make sense and fit what you are talking about. They can't be random nonsense. See who can use the word the most times and maybe have a prize.

Touch, taste and smell

Talk about sensory experiences as they arise. When you smell something (good or bad) talk about words you can use to describe it and use words other than 'nice' or 'bad.' When you touch interesting things, can your child think of a word that describes how it feels? If they use words like 'good' or 'nice' challenge them to think of a more precise word such as 'rough' or 'soothing'.

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Slightly more challenging games

I spy

Play the traditional 'I spy' game. "I spy with my little eye something beginning with ... (letter)", or give it a twist by using categories or descriptive words like this: "something coloured red/blue ..." or "something round/spiky/shiny/outside/inside that is ..." or "something that is big/beautiful/perfumed/growing/hot/noisy ..."

Alphabet game

One for the bus or car. Start with calling out 'a'. Each player then tries to spot something that starts with an 'a.' When everyone has called out an item starting with 'a' you can move on to 'b' and so on through the alphabet. For a quicker game use the letters of someone's name.

Letter and category game

Choose a category; it might be something like clothes, food or TV programmes. Then choose a letter. See how many words you can think of from that category that start with the target letter. For example, clothes starting with 's': scarf, socks, sweatshirt. Can you work your way through the whole alphabet?

What can it do?

This is another game for journeys: one player calls out an object that he/she can see and the next person has to think of five things that it can do or can be done with it. For instance, 'tree:' climb, chop, grow, fall down and absorb carbon dioxide.

Big brain

Big brain is a variation on 'I spy' but, rather than seeing something, you need to think of an object and the letter it starts with. Great for playing when you are waiting somewhere or when driving on dark evenings. "I think with my big brain something that is cold and starts with an 'i'." "Is it ice?" "No. Have another guess."

Describe it

Write down on pieces of paper a range of words. They might be related to what your child is learning in school or any words that they are familiar with. Place all the words in a 'hat'. Each person takes a turn at taking out words from the hat. The challenge is to describe the word without using it at all.

Word associations

One player starts by saying a word. The next player says a word that is related to the first word. It can be related in any way. If another player cannot see how the words are related he/she can challenge and the connection needs to be explained. Keep going until a word is repeated or a connection cannot be explained. Here's an example: Egypt – Mummy – Dad – beard – Santa Claus – Christmas – trees – leaves.

20 questions

One person thinks of an object. Others try and guess what it is by asking questions. The original player can only answer yes, no or maybe. Give a clue if they are on the wrong track. Can they guess it in 20 questions?