

Concepts

Linguistic concepts are words that describe attributes (e.g. colour, size, shape) and position (e.g. under, top, middle), and ideas relating to time and sequence (e.g. yesterday, first, after). Some children find these words more difficult to learn. They can be more abstract and their meaning can change depending on the context. For example, a dog could be described as 'big' when compared to a spider, but not when next to an elephant!

Some common concepts young children typically develop include:

- in/out, on/under, up/down
- big/little, hot/cold, wet/dry, slow/fast, empty/full, same/different
- behind/in front, above/below, before/after, first/last



Strategies for developing concepts:

- Work on one concept at a time. This may mean introducing one word initially (e.g. 'soft' vs. 'not soft', or 'hard' vs. 'not hard') before comparing the two (e.g. 'hard' vs. 'soft').
- Model language. Children learn concepts by hearing the words used in context. They will need to hear words used many times.
- Use everyday routines. Using familiar routines and everyday activities will reinforce learning. For example, when washing hands, you might talk about water being 'hot' or 'cold', or hands being 'wet' or 'dry'; when getting dressed, clothes will come 'on' or 'off', socks and shoes will be the 'same' or 'different'.
- Use real objects and hands-on experiences. Remember, concepts are often abstract so learning words in a meaningful, tangible way is really important.
- Repeat. Reinforce concepts across different situations. Children may not automatically transfer their learning so it is important to keep highlighting target words in different ways. For example, you may talk about it being 'cold' outside, 'cold' water in the water tray, 'cold' ice cream at dinnertime, etc.
- Use your child's interests. For example, if working on 'big' and your child likes to play outdoors, try spotting things that are big, blow big bubbles, practice big jumps, etc. If your child likes playing in the sand, make sure there are different sized objects and containers (e.g. big and little funnels and spades), try making a big sandcastle, dig a big hole, etc.
- Offer choices. Once familiar with the concept, try offering a choice (e.g. 'Is the car on the table or *under* the table?'). This provides a good model to copy, rather than simply testing your child. Over time, they may be able to fill in a gap (e.g. 'This car is *on* the table, this car is...' – *under the table*).

