

Using Conversation to Support Reading

Imagine your first grader brings home The Pout-Pout Fish by Deborah Diesen. As you sit down for your nightly reading time, your child enthusiastically opens the book. They begin reading, but quickly begin to encounter words like “grimace,” “aghast,” and “dreary-wearies.” Frustration begins to set in as your child struggles through the difficult vocabulary. As a parent, you wonder how to help.

This is not an uncommon scenario. Children’s books are filled with rich language that is often too difficult for children to manage on their own. One way parents can support their child is through conversation. As humans, we speak at a very basic level. We use the same words over and over which can limit our children’s vocabulary. Challenge yourself to switch up your vocabulary and begin using words your child may not already know. Instead of saying, “big” choose to say “enormous.”

Exposing children to new vocabulary will help improve your child’s ability to read. Conversation increases your child’s vocabulary. Readers use words they know to support their comprehension when reading. Increasing your child’s vocabulary will also help them identify new words when reading. So turn off the radio, and talk with your child.

As for finishing that book, you might offer to read it to your child! Make sure to explain what these new words mean.