

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is an awareness of the speech sounds within our language. It includes the ability to detect individual words within a sentence, rhymes, syllables within words, and individual sounds within syllables and words. Research has proven that the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds within words is an important factor for success in reading. You may also hear phonological awareness referred to as phonemic awareness.

You can help your child develop phonological awareness skills by reading to your child on a regular basis. Choose books that rhyme and books with alliteration (words that begin with the same sound). Listen to and sing children's songs that play with the sounds of language. Talk with your child about words and play with those words.

Here are some effective and fun activities for helping your child learn these skills.

Blending Sounds

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The ability to blend individual sounds in words is strongly related to success in reading. The ability to blend sounds helps children to sound out words when they read, blending the sounds associated with letters into words. At first, we practice this skill with just sounds, not letters. Soon we practice with both sounds and letters. Here are some activities that you can use to help your child learn to blend sounds into words.

1. Play The Turtle Talk Game. Tell your child that you are a turtle. Say, "I am going to say a word very slowly, the way a turtle might say it." Slowly say the three separate sounds in cat. (/c/ /a/ /t/) Have your child say the sounds faster, the way a person would say it. (cat) Be sure to say the sounds, not the letters, in the words that you practice. Practice with words that have two sounds first. (go, hi, zoo, see, no, my, lay, egg) Next, practice with words that have three sounds. (dog, cap, sip, soap, sun, tape, lid, bite, elf, fish, goat, can, fly, pop, rat, lip, mud) If your child can do these, move on to words that have four sounds. (mask, baby, pickle, taco, lost, puzzle, zipper) This is a fun game to play while traveling in the car. Once your child can do this pretty well, invite him to be the turtle.

2. Play I'm Thinking. Say, "I'm thinking of an animal. It's a /p/ /i/ /g/. What is it?" (pig) Other animals might include goat, cat, llama, duck, lamb, chick, or fish. While at the grocery store, say, "I'm thinking of the next item that we need to buy. It is /b/ /u/ /t/ /er/. What is it?" (butter) Again, remember to say letter sounds, not letter names, for the words that you practice.

3. Play Slide On Down. Have your child do this with you. With your left hand, touch your right shoulder and say the first sound in the word cat. /c/ Now, slide your left hand down to your right elbow, and say the middle sound in the word cat /a/ Next, slide your left hand down to your right hand, and say the final sound in cat. /t/ Finally, show your child how to slide the sounds together to make the word cat as you slide your left hand from your right shoulder all the way down to your right hand once more. Here are some other words for your child to slide and blend: lap, fall, sun, vet, note,

ripe, cup, late, meat, red, soap. Tell your child the three sounds in each of these words, and see if he can guess the word. (If your child is left handed, be sure to reverse the hands in this activity.)

Segmenting Sounds

The ability to segment and manipulate sounds in words is strongly related to success in reading and spelling. Segmenting the sounds within words helps children gain an awareness that speech consists of a series of sounds. For example, mat is made up of three different sounds, /m/ /a/ /t/. Once a student has developed an ear to hear and segment the different sounds within a word, he can then begin to write those individual sounds. At first, we practice this skill with just sounds, not letters. Soon we practice with both sounds and letters. Here are some activities that you can use to help your child learn to segment sounds in words.

Play Penny Push.

Give your child two pennies. Tell him that you are going to say a word with two sounds in it. Have him push a penny forward for each sound in the word. Say to your child, "Listen now with your ears. Say the sounds that you hear. The word is SO." Your child should push one penny forward as he says, "/ssss/." Then he should push the other penny forward as he says, "/o/." Here are some other two-sound words to practice: we, tie, no, lay, hi, eat. Once your child can do this with two-sound words, give him a third penny and try these three-sound words: cap, ask, did, lime, man, yes, mud, bite, fish, ran, game, hop, feet. Here are a few four-sound words for those wanting a challenge: mask, taco, bubble, puzzle, zipper, baby, lamp, paper, vest, lost, stop, bottle, spoon, belly.

Play Heads or Tails.

Say a word to your child, and have him toss a penny in the air. If the penny lands on heads, your child will take the first sound off of the word that you said. For example, if you said the word cat, your child will take off the /c/ sound and say at. If you said ball, your child will take off the first sound and say all. If the penny lands on tails, your child will take off the final sound of the word that you said. If you said the word soak, your child will take off the final /k/ sound and say so. If you said the word beef, your child will take off the final sound and say bee. Here are some words to use when the penny lands on heads: farm (arm), table (able), date (ate), beach (each), goat (oat), knit (it), park (ark), sand (and). Here are some words to use if the penny lands on tails: late (lay), hanger (hang), yellow (yell), keep (key), farm (far), beep (bee), pillow (pill), seen (see), grain (gray), mile (my), page (pay), time (tie), wait (way), winner (win), fright (fry), plate (play), trace (tray).

Rhyming

Becoming aware of how our spoken language works and how this relates to reading is one aspect of developing as an accomplished reader. Here are some ways to help your child learn to rhyme. Remember, children must first develop an ear for rhyme before they can start producing rhyming words.

1. One of the best ways for children to develop an ear for rhyme is to hear lots of stories that encourage language play through the use of rhyme. As you read rhyming books to your child, point out the words that rhyme on each page. (Dr. Seuss books are often full of rhyme! Another great title is *The Hungry Thing* by Jan Slepian and Ann Seidler.)
2. Recite nursery rhymes together. Emphasize the rhyming words. Say the nursery rhymes again and let your child fill in the rhyming words. "Jack and Jill went up the _____."
3. Listen to children's music. (Music by Raffi contains many great rhyming songs.)
4. Play The Name Game. Think of rhymes to go with the names of family members. (Mary Berry, Brian Lion, Jennifer Hennifer, Mama Llama, etc.) Call each other by your silly rhyming names.
5. Play Rhyme Time. Say three words to your child. Two of the words should rhyme. Have your child identify the two rhyming words. (cat/bat/dog; box/bag/fox; sack/pit/bit)
6. Play Let's Eat. As your family is eating dinner, say, "Find something that rhymes with silk. (milk) Find something that rhymes with licken." (chicken) Let your child ask you to find something that rhymes with _____.
7. Play Let's Go Shopping. As you do your grocery shopping, say to your child, "Let's buy something that rhymes with lead. (bread) Let's buy something that rhymes with mutter. (butter) You can modify this game for a trip to the pet store or a trip to the toy store. "Let's find an animal that rhymes with wish." (fish)
8. Play I'm Thinking. Say, "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with pat. You wear it on your head." (hat) "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with seen. It is a color word." (green)