

Raising Readers: Tips for Parents



What is Phonemic Awareness?

Adapted from: Elish-Piper L. (2009/2010). Information and Ideas for parents about phonemic awareness and phonics. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 31(1), 52-54

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, move or change sounds, called phonemes, in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is an important basic skill that gets students ready to develop into readers. Phonemic awareness is usually taught during kindergarten and beginning first grade. Phonemic awareness includes six basic components.

Rhyming: Identifying words that rhyme or producing words that rhyme such as, “hat” and “pat” or, “car” and “far.”

Isolation: Identifying a specific sound in a word such as, “What is the beginning sound in the ‘word ball’?” /b/. (Please note that the letter between slashes such as /b/ represents the sound the letter “b” makes when spoken.) Sound isolation

for ending or middle sounds is more difficult, but children also need to be able to identify these sounds.

For example: “What is the ending sound in the word ‘tap’?”

Answer: /p/.

Or, “What is the middle sound in ‘cup’?”

Answer: /u/.

Segmentation: Pulling apart the sounds in a word in order.

For example: “What sounds do you hear in the word ‘lip’?”

Answer: /l/ /i/ /p/.

Deletion: Taking a sound off of a spoken word such as, “Say the word ‘sit’ without the /s/.”

Answer: “it.”

Substitution: Changing a sound in a word to another sound.

For example: “My word is ‘pin.’ Change the /p/ to /w/. What is the new word?”

Answer: “win.”

Blending: Putting together sounds to make a word.

For example: “Here are the sounds in a word /m/ /a/ /t/. What is the word?”

Answer: “mat.”



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What Can Parents Do to Promote Phonemic Awareness at Home?

- Read books to your child that have rhyme, rhythm and repetition such as Dr. Seuss books, poetry books or nursery rhymes. After reading and enjoying the book, talk about the rhyming words and ask your child to think of other words that rhyme.
- Talk with your child and have fun with language. Children build their knowledge of the sounds and words in language through listening and speaking. Your child can then use this knowledge to help with learning to read and write.
- Play oral rhyming games with your child such as “I’m thinking of a toy that rhymes with ‘tall.’ What is it?” **Answer:** “ball.” Or, you could ask, “How many words can you think of that rhyme with ‘at’?”
- As you talk with your child, draw their attention to sounds in words. **For example**, you could say while petting a dog, “What a nice dog. What is the beginning sound in ‘dog’?” **Answer:** /d/. Or as you play with a stuffed cat, you could say, “What a good cat. What is the ending sound in ‘cat’?” **Answer:** /t/.
- While doing daily activities, segment or pull apart the sounds in words. This is a difficult skill for many children so it may take practice for your child to be able to do it correctly. **For example**, you could say, “Here is your ‘hat.’ I hear these sounds in ‘hat’ /h/ /a/ /t/. What sounds do you hear in ‘hat’?” **Answer:** /h/ /a/ /t/.
- As you play and talk with your child, try to include deletion activities such as, “I am tall. What is the word ‘tall’ without the beginning sound /t/?” **Answer:** “all.”
- As your child helps around the house with chores, try sound substitution activities such as, “Here is a book. Change the /b/ to /l/. What is the new word?” **Answer:** “look.”
- Give your child the sounds in a word, and ask them to blend them back to make the spoken word. **For example**, you might say, “Here are the sounds of a word: /b/ /i/ /g/. What is the word?” **Answer:** “big.”
- Enjoy silly language games with your child such as saying as many words as you can that start with the sound /l/ or /r/. Or, try to think of as many rhyming words as you can, including made-up words. **For example**, you might say, “How many words can we think of that rhyme with ‘take’?” You and your child may then come up with a list of real words such as “lake,” “make,” “rake” and “bake,” and you may also think of made-up words such as “dake” and “gake.” This type of language play builds children’s interest in words and sounds.
- Read to, sing with and talk to your child as many times each day as possible to build an interest in sounds, words and language.

We’re here to help

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