

Phonemic Awareness

Parent Handout– Kindergarten



What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words. Children must first understand that words are made up of separate speech sounds that can be blended together to make words before they can make sense of using the alphabet to read and write. Research has identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the best two predictors of how well a child will learn to read during the first two years of school (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children who develop strong phonemic awareness skills at an early age are more likely to become fluent readers and better spellers than children who do not.

What should my Kindergartener be able to do?

By the end of kindergarten, children should be able to:

- Identify whether words rhyme (hat, mat; sun, bug)
- Provide a word that rhymes with another (“tell me a word that rhymes with ‘sun’”)
- Blend syllables or onset-rimes into a word (cup–cake “cupcake”; /m/ /ap/- “map”)
- Clap or count syllables in a 1 to 3 syllable word
- Provide the first sound in a word (“what is the beginning sound in “fish”? Child: /f/)
- Segment sounds in a 2-3 phoneme word (“Tell me the sounds in ‘hat’.” Child: /h/ /a/ /t/)

How can I help my child develop phonemic awareness skills?

To help your child listen to the sound in words:

- Read books and poems that focus on the rhythm of language and rhyme. Books such as “Hop on Pop” or “Sheep in a Jeep” help children pay attention to sounds in words.
- Give your child a noisemaker (such as a whistle). Tell your child to make noise if you say two words that rhyme (cat, cup; sit, mit)
- Play words games such as “Guess My Word”. “I’m thinking of a word that rhymes with _____. Can you guess my word?”
- Have a sound scavenger hunt. Give your child a bag and ask him/her to find as many things around the house that begin with a certain sound.
- Play “I spy” with beginning sounds of words “I spy something that begins with /t/”.

To help your child segment (separate) and blend sounds in words:

- Have your child guess a word that you sound out slowly (sssssuuuuunnnn).
- Give your child 3-5 blocks, beads, bingo chips or similar items. Say a word and have your child move an object for each sound in the word.
- Play Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes with sounds. Say a word and have your child touch his/her head for the first sound, shoulders for the second sound, and knees for the third while saying each sound.
- Jump for Sounds. Say a word and have your child jump for each sound in the word while saying the sound.

