

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds (phonemes). Phonological awareness activities involve speaking and listening.

What we know!

- Phonological awareness development begins at a very early age, as children begin to identify and manipulate sounds through songs, chants and rhymes.
- Phonological awareness skills are essential for efficient literacy, language and academic development.
- Children with stronger phonological awareness skills tend to learn to read and write more easily than children with weak phonological awareness.
- Phonological Awareness skills impact on reading comprehension skills (reading for meaning) since meaning is accessed more quickly when decoding is more efficient and automatic.
- It is never too late to begin working on phonological awareness!*

Phonological awareness skills include:

- Rhyming discrimination... (Do these words sound the same? *fish/dish*)
- Rhyming production... (Can you give me a word that rhymes with '*pan*'?)
- Segmentation of sentences... (Clap one time for each word in the sentence, '*He can Swim.*')
- Segmentation of syllables... (Clap one time for each syllable in the word '*Saturday*')
- Segmentation of phonemes... (What sounds do you hear in the word '*cat*'?)
- Isolating the phoneme in the initial, medial and final positions of words... (What is the beginning sound in '*mat*'?, what is the middle sound in '*top*'?, what is the final sound in '*bus*'?)
- Deletion of compounds and syllables... (Say '*cowboy*'. Say it again but don't say '*boy*')
- Deletion of phonemes... (Say '*cat*'. Say it again but don't say /k/)
- Substituting phonemes with the use of manipulatives
- Substitution without the use of manipulatives... (What word would we have if we changed the /p/ in '*pat*' to /k/?)
- Blending syllables... (What word do we make when we put these syllables together '*ta-ble*'?)
- Blending phonemes... (What word do we make when we put these sounds together /s-u-n/)

HOW TO IMPROVE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS

When, Where and How?

Phonological awareness activities can take place almost anywhere... in fact, they should. Students should learn that words are not just made up of letters but also sounds and that those sounds can be manipulated. Practice the above skills while in the car, in line at the grocery store, before bed, while reading with your child, while practicing spelling or PWIM word lists, etc.

Remember that phonological awareness activities address speaking and listening skills. When carrying out activities, use letter sounds not letter names (e.g.: "Cat starts with a /c/ sound"). Have your student think about and feel what their mouth is doing while they are speaking (e.g.: "when I make the /th/ sound my tongue goes between my front teeth and I can hear the air squeezing through").

Make practice fun, give a lot of positive reward and praise for your child's attempts. For some children, acquiring phonological awareness is a difficult process but well worth the effort!

Resources for Phonological Awareness and Literacy Development:

Books:

These are just a few examples of books that facilitate early literacy development

- 📖 Berenstain, S. & Berenstain, J. (1966). The Bear's Picnic. New York, NY: Random House.
- 📖 Flemming, D. (1991). In the Tall, Tall Grass. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- 📖 Guarino, D. (1989). Is Your Mama a Llama?. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc..
- 📖 Martin, B. Jr. & Archambault, J. (1989). Chick Chicka Boom Boom. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc..
- 📖 Martin, B. Jr. (1983). Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- 📖 Martin, B. Jr. (1991). Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? . New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- 📖 Seuss, Dr. (1960). Green Eggs and Ham. New York, NY: Random House.
- 📖 Shaw, N. (1986). Sheep in a Jeep. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. Other "Sheep" books by the same author and publisher include: Sheep on a Ship. (1989)., Sheep in a Shop. (1991)., and Sheep out to Eat. (1992).
- 📖 Slate, J. (1996). Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books.
- 📖 Your child's classroom teacher, resource teacher or the school librarian can recommend many more books that encourage word and sound play.

TV Programs and DVDs:

- 📺 Word World (PBS)
- 📺 Super Why (PBS)
- 📺 Between the Lions (PBS)
- 📺 Leap Frog: The Letter Factory (DVD)
- 📺 Leap Frog: The Talking Word Factory (DVD)

Websites:

-  starfall.com
-  pbskids.com
-  <http://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc/>
-  <http://www.sesamestreet.org/games>

Final Thought...

Why are phonological awareness skills so important? Because all of us learned to speak before we learned to read! The written language system of English is extremely confusing and letter symbols are initially meaningless and often difficult to learn for very young children. But by continually bringing children back to their first language system (the sound system of English) they have a solid reference point from which to learn a new system of language (i.e.: reading and writing).

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