

Setting the Table-- Sound (Phonological) Awareness

What the Research Says

- Sound awareness refers to the ability to recognize that spoken words are made of different sounds. These sounds can be taken apart and put back together. (“Cat” has three sounds. /c/, /a/, /t/)
- This ability to recognize different sounds in spoken language is one of the strongest predictors of reading, writing, and spelling success.
- Families can support development of sound awareness through reading, singing, reciting nursery rhymes, and having conversations with their children.
- Sound awareness starts to develop at around three years of age, when young children start to hear and recognize the similarities and differences in rhyming words.
- Sound awareness continues to develop through the early years and at age five, most children are starting to recognize individual sounds in words. They are especially inclined to recognize individual sounds at the beginning of words. (For example: **J**uice, **j**ar, **j**elly all start with the same sound.)
- Sound awareness or phonological awareness is not the same as phonics. Phonics is the understanding that letters have specific sounds. Phonics instruction will begin in Kindergarten when children begin to learn how to read.

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Activities for Families

- Spend time having quality conversations with your child throughout daily routines (dressing, cooking, meal time, picking up toys). This will allow you to talk about sounds in words in meaningful ways. (For example: Let's pick up the toy that starts with the /d/ sound. Oh look! Here is your *dog*. * Remember, talk about the *sound*, not the *letter*.)
- Sing simple songs with your child. They have many rhyming words that you can emphasize. Twinkle , twinkle little star," "Mary had a little lamb," and similar children's songs have been enjoyed by families for decades.
- Read books that use rhyming patterns. This will allow you to draw attention to the rhymes and expose your child to new words presented in fun ways. Books like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, Miss Mary Mack, and Ten Little Monkeys* use rhyme and rhythm that children love.
- Teach and recite nursery rhymes together. Children love their fun patterns, unusual use of words, and engaging rhythms (Humpty, Dumpty sat on a wall, etc).

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Advice for Families

- Look for ways during daily routines to “play” with sounds and words. Young children learn best during meaningful, hands-on activities.
- Read books that have rhyming words, drawing attention to the rhymes. (For example: “Mama called the doctor and the doctor said, no more monkeys jumping on the bed.” Listen, “said” “bed”, those words rhyme.)
- Introduce and repeat favorite nursery rhymes over and over. As your child becomes familiar with the rhymes, leave off some ending words to see if your child can supply the missing word. (For example: “Jack and Jill went up the _____.”)
- Teach your child simple songs like “The itsy, bitsy, spider.” You can emphasize the rhyming words while you sing.
- Resist the temptation to assign a letter name to the sound. (For example: The “t” makes the /t/ sound. Just playing with the sounds will have great benefits for literacy learning.
- Use your child’s name as a starting point to play with words. (For example: “Sara, we’re going to have something for lunch that starts with the same sound as your name....soup. Sara, soup...they both start with the same sound.”)