

A Guide to Phonics

Introduction

Children are learning to read, write and spell on a journey. The way we teach them is called Phonics. Learning phonics is the beginning of the process of children learning to read and the start of their lifelong literacy journey.

The process of learning to read and write begins from an early age and can be done in a range of ways and settings, including at home.

Spoken Language

Listening and talking to your child is of vital importance. As part of everyday activities, talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Listening and talking are the building blocks for reading and writing, and exposing children to conversation, as well as books, is essential. The more language your child is exposed to, the more they will understand and use for themselves.

Listening and Talking

This is the beginning of the learning of phonics and takes place predominantly in Nursery or Pre-School.

During this time, children should be exposed to a language-rich environment. Activities are mainly adult-led and build up to teaching children the important basic elements such as oral segmenting and blending.

Useful Information

- Sharing books from an early age is hugely beneficial for children.
- Children begin to see reading as a source of pleasure through sharing and enjoying them together.
- Through sharing good books, children's vocabulary increases which enables them to talk confidently.

There are seven ways you can encourage children in early stage of phonics learning.

Environmental Sounds

Children are exposed to a variety of sounds in the environment, and encouraged to copy them.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Children are exposed to a range of books and rhymes. Children are encouraged to join in with repeated refrains and rhymes.

Instrumental Sounds

Children are encouraged to listen to and make sounds using different instruments.

Alliteration

Children are encouraged to listen to initial sounds within words. They are asked to think of other words beginning with the same sound.

Body Percussion

Children use their body to accompany songs and rhymes, for example, by clapping and tapping.

Voice Sounds

Children are asked to create different mouth movements and say a range of sounds.

Oral Blending

At first, the adult will show the children how this is done. The separate sounds are clearly spoken aloud, in order, fairly quickly and are then merged together into the whole word. For example:

m-a-n man

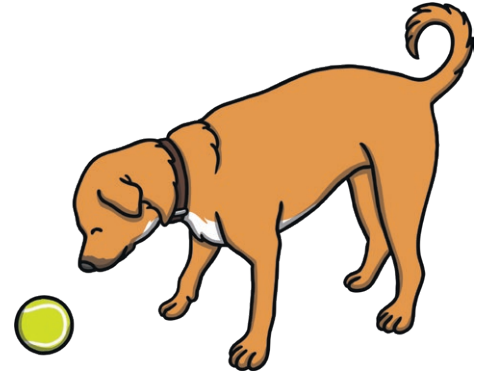
The merging together of the sounds is called blending. Initially, children may not be able to merge the sounds together independently and will need frequent practise which is highly beneficial.

Oral Segmenting

This is the opposite to oral blending. Here, children hear the whole word before it is then broken into separate sounds. For example:

dog d-o-g

This skill is called segmenting and is vital in order for children to be able to spell. Initially, children might only be able to hear the initial sound and will need frequent practise.



Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Share a range of rhymes.

Practise oral blending in and around the home. You can do this by talking in the following way:

- c-a-t, cat
- Can you put on your s-o-ck?

Initially, the children will just listen and then with time, they will be able to join in, hearing the words the sounds create.

Simple Sounds and Words

Now the children will develop their oral blending and segmenting of words. They will also then be taught the sounds each letter makes. Each school will learn the sounds in a different order. Some may learn the letters in the order of the alphabet, but some may learn the sounds in a way that allows the children to create words very quickly. For example, they may learn s, a, t, p, i and n first as the children can begin spelling words such as sat, pat, pan, nap, etc.

Additionally, the children may be taught that sounds can be represented by more than one letter. For Example: fin, huff.

The process of learning a sound, includes:

- Saying a number of words with the same initial sound and exaggerating it, e.g. ssssnake, sssssun
- Showing the children the letter that represents the sound.
- Flashing a card with the letter on one side and a picture on the other. When the children see the letter side, they are to say the sound. When they see the picture sound, they say the word corresponding to the picture.

VC and CVC Words

During this stage in learning, children will be taught to read different words using the sounds and letters they have been exposed to.

V = vowel

C = consonant

VC words are those that consist of a vowel and then a consonant, e.g. am, on, it.

CVC words are those that consist of a consonant then a vowel and then a consonant, e.g. cat, dog, pen. Some longer words are also CVC words because they only have three sounds, e.g. b-e-ll.

Useful Tip

Pure sounds should be used when children are saying sounds. This means, where possible, the 'uh' sounds after consonants should not be said, e.g. the sound 'f' should be pronounced ffff rather than fuh.

Useful Tip

The children may use magnetic letters to make and spell words, read words on the whiteboard and on flash cards as well as beginning to write words.

High Frequency or Common Words

During the children's learning, the children may also be exposed to high frequency or common words; some of which cannot be sounded out, e.g. the, and, said, in. The children will be exposed to more high frequency and common words as they develop their vocabulary and phonics knowledge.

The children will soon be encouraged to read these words on 'sight' meaning that they recognise them and do not need to sound them out.

Useful Tip

It is important children learn to read words without blending as soon as possible. Children progress from blending out loud, to blending in their head before reading on sight. The sooner they can read on sight, the quicker their fluency will improve.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds and words the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Using flashcards, expose children regularly to the sounds and they have learnt. Remember to use pure sounds.
- Using magnetic letters on the fridge or any type of magnetic surface, children can practise making words.
- Using letter cards, children can blend sounds together to make words.
- Ask children to spell out high frequency and common words, CV and CVC words both orally and on paper.



Beginning Blends

The children will now:

- Begin to learn that some sounds are made up of two or three letters.
- Practise blending and segmenting a wider range of CVC or progress onto CVCC and CCVC words.
- Read more high frequency or common words and begin to spell them.
- Read familiar words on sight, rather than decoding them.

Blends

The children may be introduced to consonant blends such as ck or sh.

The following blends may also be taught:

'nt' as in tent

'st' as in toast

'pl' as in plum

'sp' as in spoon



CVCC or CCVC Words

Blends are common in CVCC or CCVC words. Children will soon progress from CVC words to CVCC and CCVC words.

Some examples of CVCC and CCVC words your child might read during their learning could be:

milk lamp nest flag grab chat

Useful Tip

It is important children learn to recognise blends as one sound, rather than as separate letters. e.g. rain should be read as r-ai-n not r-a-i-n.

Useful Tip

Frequent practise allows your child to become more fluent.

Using Sounds and Blends in Reading and Spelling

The children will now begin to apply their knowledge and understanding of sounds and blends in reading and spelling. When spelling words, children will now need to choose the appropriate letters to represent sounds.

Here are some examples of sounds they may begin to use:

ay ou ie ea oy ir ue aw wh ph ew oe au a-e e-e

i-e o-e u-e

Useful Tip

Children may be now introduced to some split digraphs.

a-e e-e i-e o-e u-e

Children will learn that the 'e' on the end causes the initial vowel to make the longer vowel sound rather than the shorter one.

e.g. a-e will sound as ay, e-e will sound as ee, i-e will sound as igh, o-e will sound as oo and u-e will sound as ue.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds and words the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Ask your child to make or spell words. Support them whilst they figure out how the sound needs to be represented.
- Focus on split digraphs using flashcards, try to increase the speed you show children.
- Encourage children to write as many sounds/words as possible in a set amount of time.
- Expose children to a wider range of stories which include longer texts.

Developing Fluency and Decoding

By now, children should know most of the common letters, sounds and blends. As a result of this, they should be able to read hundreds of words. This will be in one of three ways:

- Reading the word on sight when they are very familiar.
- Decoding the word quickly and/or silently.
- Decoding the word aloud.

Now, the aim is for children to become fluent readers and increasingly accurate spellers.

Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

Using the sounds and words the children have been exposed to, the following games and activities can be done:

- Track the words with your finger as you or your child reads aloud.
- Read a favourite book, poem or nursery rhyme over and over again. Encourage your child to develop fluency and expression each time.
- Encourage children to write as many sounds/words as possible in a set amount of time.
- Model fluent reading and expression while reading to your child.
- Listen to an audio book, while your child tracks the words on the print copy.
- Encourage children to read words on 'sight' by very quickly showing them flashcards and they have to read it without sounding or blending.



Handwriting

Children will begin to learn to sit correctly, hold a pencil correctly and form letters correctly, knowing where they should start and end. This leads them into joining letters correctly, which allows for faster fluency when writing.

Pre-Writing Skills

It is essential that a child begins to write when they are ready. In order to prepare your child, there are many activities that can be done in various settings, including at home.

Writing readiness can be defined in a number of ways:

- hand and finger strength
- upper limb strength
- hand dominance
- pencil grasp
- hand-eye coordination



Ways You Can Support Your Child at Home

- From an early age, allow your child access to various writing materials of all shapes and sizes, e.g. paint brushes, crayons, pencils, pens.
- Encourage participation in skills that involve manipulating objects, e.g. jigsaws, threading.
- Encourage activities to promote finger strength, e.g. tweezers, building bricks, playdough.
- Encourage activities to promote gross motor skills, e.g. painting walls outside with water, using a wheel- barrow, climbing ladders.
- Encourage activities to promote hand-eye coordination, e.g. ball games, skipping, throwing a frisbee, throwing stones into the sea.

What Else Can I Do at Home?

Promoting a love for reading is paramount. There are many different ways this can be done from an early age:

- Sing nursery rhymes from an early age. When your child is old enough, they can join in.
- Share books regularly. Buy books or go to the local library. Read books by the same author and reread your child's favourites.
- Listen to your child read and remember to continue to read to them. It is important they are exposed to vocabulary beyond their reading ability.
- Allow your child to see you reading for pleasure. It may be fiction or non-fiction.
- Allow your child to practise their reading skills. Encourage blending aloud, as well as in their heads.
- Talk about books. Ask the children what is happening, how the characters are feeling and what they have enjoyed.
- Use props and puppets to tell stories. Allow their imaginations to run wild!
- Use ambitious vocabulary, explaining its meaning.
- Listen to songs and add actions.
- Read rhyming books together. Ask the children to fill in missing parts and join in with repeated refrains.
- Make reading a pleasure not a chore!

