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What is Phonological Awareness?

by Lindsay Knoblauch, M.Ed., CCC-SLP

Phonological awareness skills are important in order to develop good reading skills. Having good phonological awareness skills means that a child is able to manipulate sounds and words, or “play” with sounds and words. For example, a teacher or speech-language pathologist might ask a child to break the word “cat” into individual sounds: “c-a-t.”

Phonological awareness includes the following skills:



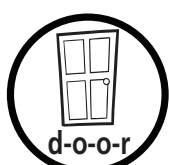
- Recognizing when words rhyme (e.g., “Do ‘cat’ and ‘shoe’ rhyme?”) and coming up with a word that rhymes (e.g., “What rhymes with ‘key’?”)



- Segmentation of words in sentences (e.g., “Clap for each word you hear in the sentence ‘The dog is furry.’”)



- Blending syllables (e.g., “I am going to say parts of a word. Tell me what the word is. ‘Pan-da.’”)



- Segmentation of syllables (e.g., “Clap for each syllable you hear in the word ‘refrigerator.’”)



- Deletion of syllables (e.g., “Say the word ‘strawberry.’ Now say it without saying ‘straw.’”)



- Identifying sounds in words (e.g., “What sound do you hear at the end of ‘tulip’?”)

- Blending sounds (e.g., “Put these sounds together to make a word. ‘D-oo-r.’”)

- Segmentation of sounds (e.g., “Tell me each sound you hear in the word ‘cat’?”)

- Deletion of sounds (e.g., “Say ‘chair.’ Now say it without the ‘ch.’”)

- Addition of sounds (e.g., “Say ‘cook.’ Now say it with an ‘e’ at the end.”)

- Manipulation of sounds (e.g., “Change the ‘s’ in ‘sad’ to a ‘d’ and say the new word.”)

Why is Phonological Awareness Important?

Phonological awareness is important because it is a basis for reading. Children begin to read by listening to others read aloud, then recognizing sounds in words, sounding words out for themselves, recognizing familiar words, and so on. By engaging in word play, children learn to recognize patterns among words and use this knowledge to read and build words.



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How Can You Reinforce These Skills at Home?

The following is a list of ways to encourage children to play with sounds and words by practicing different types of patterns (e.g., ones you see, one you hear, or ones that involve movement, counting, and imitating).

- Play traditional hand-clapping games such as "Patty Cake" and "Miss Mary Mack."



- Gather paper and crayons and have your child draw a picture of a rhyming sentence such as "Dad is glad," or "A frog sat on the log." Talk about the rhyming words and how they sound alike. Have the child think of other words that rhyme and make up his/her own sentence using new rhyming words.

- Give the child four words, three of which rhyme. Ask the child to identify the word that does not rhyme. For example, if you said "bell, box, fell, tell," the child would identify "box" as the word that does not rhyme with the others.



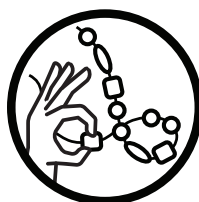
- When reading books to your child that contain rhyming words, emphasize the rhyming words as you read. Dr. Seuss books are great for this activity. After reading a book, ask your child to remember as many of the rhyming words as he/she can.

- While sitting around the dinner table, play a game of "Telephone." Whisper a 5–7 word sentence in the person's ear to your right and have that person whisper in the ear of the person to his/her right. Continue until each member of the dinner table has a chance to listen and whisper. The last person to hear the sentence says it aloud.



- While riding in the car, say a sentence to your child but leave the last word blank. Ask your child to provide a rhyming word. For example, say "I see a dog on a _____." Your child could say, "log," "hog," "bog," or "frog."

- Tap out the individual words in a sentence. For the sentence, "The sun is shining," you would tap or clap four times. When the child is able to count the words in a sentence, clap out the syllables in a word and then the sounds in a word.



- Buy inexpensive beads and string at a craft store. Give your child some string and beads and have him or her tie a knot at one end. Say a word and have your child string one bead for each sound he/she hears in the word. You could also use this activity and have the child string beads on the string for each syllable he or she hears. For example, the word "can" would receive three beads when counting sounds and one bead when counting syllables.



Resources:

Montgomery, Judy (2004). Funnel Toward Phonics! Greenville, South Carolina: Super Duper Publications.

Chard, D. J. & Dickson, S. V. (1999). Phonological Awareness Instructional and Assessment Guidelines. LD online. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6254>

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