

Guidance for Parents

Helping your child at home: Phonics – What is Phonics?

Phonics is a way of teaching reading. Your child is taught to read letters or groups of letters by saying the sound(s) that they stand for. Once a child begins to learn the sounds, they can then put them together (blending) to make a word. Before your child can do this, they need to develop their listening and attention skills. This process starts from a very young age and develops through nursery or pre-school and continues as your child moves through school.

Pre phonics – Phase 1

Before your child learns about letters and phonics, they need to learn to listen carefully and talk about what they hear, see and do. Children need opportunities to explore and experiment with sounds.

Activity Ideas

Action songs and rhymes

Singing songs and action rhymes are really important pre-reading skills and should happen daily. Get your child to add claps, knee pats and foot stamps or to move in a particular way. Encourage your child to concentrate so they know when to add sounds and when to move.

Rhyming words

Support your child to play with rhyming words. The adult begins with the prompt "I know a word that rhymes with cat, you put one on your head and the word is...hat." To support your child, give them a choice of 2 words, eg 'is it hat or glasses?' As your child becomes familiar with rhyme, let them just guess the rhyming word.

I spy – initial sounds

A great game whilst walking, or in the car/bus. Say "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with..." and give the *sound* of the first letter (not the name of the letter.) Choose easy to spot words. Support your child with clues, such as 'it's on the grass.'

Listening game

Go outside and see how many different sounds your child can hear. Can they name them all? Encourage them to try to make the sound themselves.

Mouth movements

Explore different mouth movements with your child – blowing, sucking, tongue stretching and wiggling. Practising these movements regularly to music can be fun and helps children with their articulation (saying the sounds).

I spy words

Gather objects with two or three letter sounds e.g. c-ar, k-ey, h-a-t, c-u-p, l-ea-f, b-oo-k, Say "I spy with my little eye a k-ey." Then ask your child to say the name of the object and hold it up. Your child can then try and copy the individual sounds and blend them together 'k-ey is key'.

Learning letters sounds and starting to read - Phase 2+

Children need to continue to experience listening and attention activities. Once they are in reception they will start to learn some letter sounds and develop the skills to start reading and writing. Letters are not usually taught in alphabetical order. The order varies from school to school depending on the phonic scheme they use.

Please speak to your child's school to find out what phonic scheme they follow and how best you can support your child.

Your child will be taught two crucial things when they are learning to read using phonics:

1. How sounds are represented by written letters. For example, they will be taught that the letter 's' represents a sss sound.
2. How sounds can be blended together to make words. For example, they will be taught that the sounds of the letters 'd-o-g' blend together to make the word 'dog'.

Activity Ideas

Letter jump

Write letters on the floor outside with chalk. Ask your child to jump from letter to letter, saying each sound. Change the noise level or how they say each sound -quietly, slowly, squeaky, scared. Next you call out a letter sound for your child to jump on.

Sound hunt

Encourage children to hunt around the house or garden for objects beginning with a certain sound. This can also be done with words hidden around the house.

'Fishing for phonics'

'Fish' for words written on ping pong balls. The balls could be in the bath or hidden in the house. Your child could use a net to try and catch the balls.

Hopscotch with words

Pictures/toys to be put on the hopscotch - your child needs to sound out the word they land on. Put words on the hopscotch - your child needs to sound out/read the word.

Wizard's Magic River

Prepare a box/tray with small objects or pictures from around the house (for example, a peg, a bag, a cup, a pen). Say the words, 'Wizard, Wizard can we cross your magic river?' Ask your child to repeat this to memorise the sentence. You are now the Wizard! Then they say the sentence to you and you reply saying the sounds in order. For example, 'only if you give me the...' /p/ /e/ /g/. Develop these games further by using word cards instead of objects so your child reads the words.

Water words

Fill empty plastic squirty bottles with water, encourage your child to write different sounds and words outside on the ground. You could also use different sized paint brushes dipped in water to write on the floor or wall.

Balloon words

Blow up a few balloons, write some letter sounds or words on the balloons. Bounce the balloons around the room. As your child catches the balloon encourage them to say the sound/word they see.

Useful Links

[A parent's guide to phonics](#)

[Phonics audio guide](#)

[Oxford Owl - Letters and sounds](#)

[Oxford Owl - Read Write Inc](#)