

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE INFORMATION FOR EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

Rhymes, songs and playing with sounds: setting foundations for literacy

Being able to hear and process the different sounds within speech provides the foundation for language skills and the basis for early reading and writing skills.

We know from research that pre-school children who are good at games involving rhymes, blending or swapping sounds, or separating out sounds within words are the children who do best when it comes to reading and writing at school.

This ability to hear and process the sounds within words is sometimes called phonemic awareness.

Help children to hear rhythm in language by:

- Tapping or playing drums in time with simple songs like nursery rhymes or jingles
- Singing along to or marching in time with music
- Chanting and playing hand clap games

Help children to hear rhymes in language by:

- Having lots of exposure to rhyming books, nursery rhymes and songs.
- Singing nursery rhymes and songs together and leaving gaps for children to fill in a missing rhyme
- Matching up rhyming pairs of objects or pictures

Help children to hear starting sounds in words by:

- Practising tongue twisters which involve lots of words with the same first sound
- Playing I-spy (using the sound, not the letter name)
- Playing matching games or going on learning walks searching for items starting with a particular sound

Help children to hear that words are made up of different sounds by:

- Practising blending sounds – can children guess what word it is you are thinking of when you separate the sounds of the word? For younger children, you can separate syllables e.g. /ti/ /ger/. For older children, try the start and end sounds e.g. /sn/ /ake/ or even separating out all the sounds e.g. /d/ /u/ /ck/. Ask children to separate word for you to guess.
- Practising swapping sounds in words e.g. 'cat' with a /h/ at the beginning makes 'hat'

Remember: Phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics. Phonics involves letters and printed words. Phonemic awareness is all about sounds.

For older children in pre-school, learning some letter names and sounds and linking letters to sounds is a helpful start towards early reading. But be aware of the importance and value of playing these sounds games without worrying about letters and print. You will set children up with a strong foundation for later phonics teaching and learning.