

Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

Phase 1 Phonics – An Early Years Practitioners Guide

The purpose of this guidance is to support early years practitioners to understand what Phase 1 Phonics is and provide simple to use activity ideas that can be used to develop children's listening, attention and speaking skills.

What is Phonics?

Phonics is a method for teaching reading and writing. It develops the ability to hear, recognise and use the sounds within words. Children are also taught the correspondence between sounds (phonemes) and the letters (graphemes) that represent them. Phase 1 of phonics surrounds language and communication development, one of the prime areas of learning in the EYFS.

Why Phase 1 phonics?

Phase 1 concentrates on developing children's speaking and listening skills and lays the foundations for the phonic work which starts in Phase 2. The emphasis during Phase 1 is to get children attuned to the sounds around them.

It is crucial to develop children's listening skills as:

- Phonics learning relies on children being able to hear and distinguish the sounds within words.
- Children with poor listening and/or attention skills can struggle with phonics learning.
- Listening skills improves Communication and Language.
- Good listening skills develops children's Literacy and Comprehension skills.



Without these skills, children may struggle to master the next stage of their phonics learning.

Letters represent sounds and if a child cannot hear what a word starts with for example 'm' for mouse or 'c' for car, then they will not be able to link the letter sound to the written form moving forward. That is why it is so crucial that Phase 1 phonics is part of the day-to-day practice in early years settings.

Typically, children begin to develop the listening skills essential to phonics in their preschool years. Some children begin to learn letter sounds at pre-school but most children will begin their main phonics learning once they start their reception year at primary school (age 4-5). This teaching continues through year 1 (age 5-6) and into year 2, (age 6-7) until the child is a confident and fluent reader.

How?

You can make teaching Phase 1 phonics part of your everyday activities by getting children to listen to the sounds around them. This can be done by:

- Playing games and activities which encourage careful listening.
- Providing daily speaking and listening activities that are well matched to children's developing abilities and interests, which enable them to talk extensively about what they hear, say and do.

- Reading with children; lots of opportunities should be provided for children to engage with books that fire their imagination and interests.
- Sing lots of nursery rhymes; they help children's brains to segment words into syllables, hear similarities between words that rhyme or start with the same sounds.
- Model speaking and listening using the [ShREC](#) approach.

The Environment

To support children's early phonics, the physical and emotional environment plays an important role. Review your setting and consider:

- Do you have quiet, cosy spaces where children have a chance to think and talk together? Make sure these spaces are out of the flow of traffic. Supply cushions, bean bags or drapes to soften noise and make the area more private. You could even cover a table with fabric for children to sit and talk underneath.
- Is there minimal background noise? Trying to compete with songs or music in the background can often make it harder to listen and concentrate for young children.
- Do you have a wide selection of good quality fiction, non-fiction and poetry books which children can access independently? Include big books, board books, and homemade books with photographs. A comfortable space for adults to share books with one or two or a group of children. Puppets and props for storytelling and story sacks.
- Are there opportunities for children to have something to talk about? The activities and opportunities you provide are great conversation starters. Children are more likely to engage when they are interested and involved in something that excites them or they love doing.
- Are open ended activities accessible for children whatever their language levels?



Activity Ideas

Environmental Sounds

Listening Walks

These can take place indoors or outdoors, remind the children about the things good listeners do – keep quiet, have ears and eyes ready. Encourage the children to listen to the sounds around them and talk about the different sounds they can hear.

Describe and Find It

Set up a model farmyard, describe one of the animals, (do not name it) and ask the children to say which animal it is. Can they make the noise the animal might make?

Enliven Stories

Involve the children in songs and stories, brought to life by role-play, props and repeated sounds.

Instrumental Sounds

Which Instrument?

You will need 2 sets of identical instruments. Introduce them to the children, naming them and providing opportunities for the children to hear the sounds they make. One child or an adult then plays an instrument behind a

screen. The other children have to identify which instrument has been played.

Matching Sounds

Invite a small group of children to sit in a circle and provide a selection of instruments. One child, or an adult, starts the game by playing the instrument – the instrument is then passed around the circle and each child must make the same sound or pattern of sounds as the leader, continue until the instrument gets back to the leader.

Story Sounds

As you read or tell stories, encourage the children to play their instruments in different ways, i.e. '*Can you make the sound of the giant's footsteps?*' As they become more familiar, they could each be responsible for a different sound in the story.

Body Percussion

Action Songs

Sing songs and action rhymes; children need to develop a wide range of songs and rhymes. Include multi-sensory experiences, including action songs where children have to add claps, knee pats or move in a particular way.

Follow the Sound

Invite a small group of children to sit in a circle, produce a body percussion sound, which is then 'passed' onto the child sitting next to you until the sound goes all around the circle. Encourage the children to think about the sound...what changed? Did it get faster/slower etc?

Words About Sounds

When engaging with children in their chosen activities, introduce vocabulary that helps them to discriminate sounds and contrast sounds. I.e. *slow/fast, quiet/loud, long/short*. Name the type of sound, *click, stamp* etc or the type of movement, *rock, march, skip*.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Silly Soup

With a small group of children sitting in a circle, have a selection of rhyming objects, i.e., cat, hat, rat etc. Use a bowl and spoon as props to act out the song. Invite the children, one by one, to choose an object to put in the soup. After each turn, stir the soup and sing (to the tune of Pop Goes the Weasel):

*I'm making lots of silly soup,
I'm making soup that's silly,
I'm going to cook it in the fridge,
To make it nice and chilly,
In goes...a fox....a box...some socks etc*



Songs and Rhymes

Include a selection of songs to sing daily which involve children experimenting with their voices, i.e. Hickory Dickory Dock, children can join in with 'wheeeee' when the mouse goes down etc.

Odd One Out

Choose 3 objects or pictures, two with names that rhyme and one that doesn't. Ask the children to identify the odd one out – the name that doesn't rhyme. Children need to be familiar with the rhyming word families before they can play this game.

Alliteration

Sounds Around

Use word play with initial sounds throughout the day. Use opportunities as they arise by using children's names or objects that are of personal interest to them, i.e., David's dangerous dinosaurs.

Sound Bag/Box

Make collections of objects with the names beginning with the same sound, create a song, such as 'What have we got in the box today...?' Then show the objects one by one, emphasising the initial sound – 's-s-s-sock'. To extend this further, children could predict what object might be pulled out of the box/bag next, using the same letter sound.

Name Play

Call out a child's name and make up a fun sentence starting with the name, i.e., Ben has a big, bouncy ball. Encourage the children to think up their own similar sentences.

Voice Sounds

Making Trumpets

Make trumpet shapes from simple cones of paper/card or use tubes, encourage the children to make different noises through the cones. Model sounds for the children and contrast loud and soft sounds.



Whose voice?

Record some children talking whilst they're busy in their chosen activities. Play the recording to a larger group of children, can they identify each other's voices? You could also record adults talking too.

Sound Story time

Encourage the children to use their voices to add sounds to stories such as Bear Hunt, The Three Billy Goats Gruff etc. Repeat favourite poems/rhymes in different voices together and talk about the differences.

Oral Blending and Segmenting

Toy Talk

Introduce a soft toy that can only speak in 'sound-talk'. The adult asks the toy a question 'What would Sarah like for lunch today?' The toy whispers into the adult's ear and the adult repeats 'ch-ee-se,' looking confused, then says 'cheese!' Now invite the children to speak in toy talk... 'ch-ee-se.' Use different scenarios. i.e. what does the toy like to do outside etc? The children can be encouraged to answer using sound-talk.

Clapping Sounds

Think of words using 's,a,t,p,i,n' (i.e. sat, pin, nip, nap, tap, pat, pit, pip) and sound them out, clapping each phoneme with the children altogether.. 'n-i-p.' Then blend the phonemes to make the whole word orally.

I Spy

Place a selection of items with names containing 2 or 3 phonemes, i.e., cap, zip, hat, cup, ball, comb, on the floor or a table. Check all the children know the names of the items. The toy from the activity above, or the adult says 'I spy with my little eye a z-i-p.' Then invite a child to say the name of the object and hold it up. All children could also have photos of the objects and wave the correct photo that matches the object. You can extend this game by selecting objects with the same initial letter sound.



Now What?

As a team, think about and plan how you can further entwine Phase 1 phonic activities into your daily practice. Think about:

- Do you have the right resources?
- Do you have enough resources?
- Are you providing spaces for children to talk and think together?
- Are you reading high quality story books to children?
- Do children have access to a wide range of different books, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, magazines etc.
- Are you singing songs and nursery rhymes and making up songs with silly sounds daily?
- Are you providing a range of different music for the children to listen to from rap to classical?

Explain to parents/carers **how** you are supporting children to develop their early phonics using Phase 1 and children's everyday play / experiences and interactions in the provision. You could create a simple handout explaining what Phase 1 phonics is and the ways this is supported in the provision. You could also share some top tips to help parents/carers support their children's early listening, speaking and attention skills at home.



Further Information

- [Letter and Sounds Principles and Practice of High Quality Phonics \(for information only\)](#)
- [Waltham Forest The Hub Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Supporting the Development of Phonological Awareness – Teach Early Years](#)