

# Early Years Library

READ THE  
INTRODUCTION  
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

## PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

What do we  
mean by  
phonological  
awareness?

Children develop the ability to hear the differences between sounds in language and use these sounds creatively to produce words. Recognising sounds, syllables, and rhymes lays a foundation for children to produce their own rhymes and blend and segment sounds to compose words.

Why is it  
important

Phonological awareness is foundational in reading and writing. Teaching children how to recognise sounds and syllables in words and how to orally blend and segment sounds is an early building block for learning how to read.

### Identifying a word's first and last sounds

Children begin to distinguish the first sounds in words, recognising when two words share the same first sound, and producing new words that begin with a particular sound. When confident in recognising the first sounds in words, children can learn how to distinguish the last sound.

#### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Demonstrate how to split words up into their first and last sounds and explain how you identify those sounds
- Give children lots of opportunities to talk about words' first sounds
- Use visual tools such as posters and printed materials to reinforce the idea of first and last sounds
- Repeat sounds and split words into their first and last sounds throughout the day

#### Inspiring Ideas

- Oh no! The animals can only eat food that begins with the same first sound as their name! Help the zookeepers find chocolate for chimps, sausages for snakes and eggs for elephants!
- Support children to make piles of objects beginning with the same sound. Draw the letters on paper to label the piles as they create them: *"You've brought a rrrr-abbit! And you've brought a rrrr-ed crayon! They both start with r!"*
- I spy! Use both the first and last sounds in words in games of I spy: *"I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'ch'... Chair! That's right! I spy with my little eye a colour ending with 'ed'... Red! You got it!"*

#### Tip

Children find it easier to recognise the first sound in words, start there and progress to words' last sounds.

## Recognising rhyming sounds by listening

Children become familiar with the concept of rhyming and learn to identify when sounds and words rhyme by listening to words read aloud in activities, songs, poems and games. Being able to hear when something rhymes is the first step to children becoming more familiar with different groups of words (e.g. words ending in *-ing*) and becoming more confident at telling when words rhyme, and when they don't.

### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children which words rhyme by emphasising and talking about words that rhyme
- Discuss why and when words rhyme, and when they don't, and ask children to identify rhymes
- Repeat sounds, syllables or words to help children become familiar with different rhyming words and sounds
- Use books, poems, songs and nursery rhymes to give children lots of opportunities to listen to rhyming words
- Use games and role play activities to support children to listen to and repeat rhymes

### Inspiring Ideas

- Point out the rhyming words in a familiar nursery rhyme, pausing to let children fill in the rhyming word if they can. *"Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you...are! 'Star' and 'are' sound the same, they rhyme. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the...sky! That's the rhyme! You are rhyming experts!"*
- Have a mischievous puppet or teddy read a poem or sing a song with rhyming words in it, while children join in. Teddy says a funny, made-up word in the place of a familiar rhyme!
- Fill a bucket with pairs of toys that rhyme like a cake and a snake or a fox and a box. Have the children take turns to pick an object until everyone has something. *"Oh you've picked the clock! And your friend has picked the s...ock! That's right, they rhyme! That means the end of the words sounds the same. Who else can find a pair that rhymes?"*

#### Tip

Show children that their mouths make the same shape when they are saying words that rhyme.

#### Tip

As children become more familiar with recognising rhyming sounds by listening, showing them rhyming words in print can further support their learning.

## Producing rhyming sounds and words

As children develop skill and confidence in recognising rhymes, activities progress to support children in being able to come up with their own rhyming sounds and phrases.

### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and ask children questions about rhyming words and phrases and prompt them to come up with their own rhymes
- Show children how to make up their own rhymes by brainstorming potential rhyming words
- Repeat lots of rhyming sounds, syllables and words throughout activities and discussions
- Use pictures from books and tools in your setting to encourage children to think of rhyming words

### Inspiring Ideas

- Your name sounds the same! Support children to swap the first letter or sound of their name to make a funny rhyming name – *“Lily, you look ch-illy!”* – encouraging them to think of lots of rhyming nonsense words once they are more confident.
- Using a story with lots of rhymes, look carefully at the pictures and repeat the last line of the previous page. *“When I’m driving in my car, I look up and see a...’ Can anyone see something on this page that rhymes with car? Yes! A star! Can we think of other words that rhyme with car and star? How about ‘I have to drive very f...”*
- Rhyme hunt! Hold up a coloured crayon and ask children to run and find something that rhymes with the crayon’s colour, shouting it out when they get there. *“Sink! Wow! That does rhyme with pink! Can anybody find something that rhymes with blue? You found glue!”*

#### Tip

Making up nonsense rhyming words is a great way for children to learn the rules of rhyming

#### Tip

Using lots of songs and chants helps children to recognise, repeat and make up new rhymes

## Syllable awareness

Children develop an awareness that syllables make up words. They begin to break words into syllables and blend syllables together to form words. Activities involve clapping, blending or segmenting words into syllables.

### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how to break words up into syllables by demonstrating how you would do it
- Ask children how they might break up words into syllables and prompt them to try it
- Repeat different sounds to reinforce how you might break words into syllables and blend them back together to make words
- Use clapping, drums or other resources to count syllables, reinforcing that words are made up of different parts

### Inspiring Ideas

- At the beginning of the day, say hello to children by clapping along with the syllables in their names. Encourage children to join in and try to clap others' names.
- Syllable song! Encourage children to bang on a drum or stamp their feet along to the syllables in their names, interesting words or nursery rhymes.
- Separate children into two groups, giving some children the first syllable of a two syllable animal name and others the second syllable. Ask children to stand next to their partner and support them to blend the syllables together: "*chee...tah...cheetah! Well done!*"

### Tip

Compound words like goldfish and rainbow can be easily split up and put back together to help introduce children to the concept of syllables.

### Oral segmenting (from words to sounds)

Segmenting involves breaking words down into smaller parts. It is the opposite of blending sounds together to form words. When children are confident in segmenting 'chicken' into the two syllables chi-cken, they can segment the word sound by sound: ch-i-ck-en (for instance, when children are confident in segment 'table' into the two syllables ta-ble, they can segment the word sound by sound: t-a-b-l). Being able to break spoken words up into their separate sounds is an important building block for children's reading and writing.

#### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how you might break up words into their different parts
- Repeat the sounds that word parts make so children become familiar with different word sounds
- Discuss and ask questions about splitting words up into their sounds to provide children with lots of opportunities to practise breaking up words

#### Inspiring Ideas

- RAINBOW! Show children how you can clap each syllable: RAIN-BOW. As children's awareness develops, you can start with the first syllable, RAIN and clap each sound: r-ai-n. Repeat with the sounds of the second syllable, BOW: b-ow.
- Stand up sounds! Choosing simple words with three sounds, shout out a word and have one child quickly stand up, shout out the first sound, then sit down. Have the other children do the same, shouting out the sounds in order. *"The word is SHIP! 'SH'! 'I'! 'P'! Brilliant job!"*

# PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

## Oral blending (from sounds to words)

Oral blending (using sounds to create words) is the opposite of oral segmenting (breaking words down into sounds). Being able to blend sounds together to make words is an important building block for children's reading and writing.

### Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and ask questions about the parts that make up words and how they blend together
- Use books, poems and songs to give children lots of opportunities to hear and practise rhymes and repeated refrains to familiarise them with blending parts of words together
- Have children repeat the sounds of word parts so they become familiar with producing different sounds

### Inspiring Ideas

- Simon Says! Make Simon Says a bit trickier by sounding out the words and encouraging children to blend the sounds together before they complete the actions: *"Simon says touch your h-ea-d! Simon says j-um-p!"*
- What am I looking at? Support children to find the item you are carefully sounding out. *"What am I looking at? It's a d-o-g... yes! The DOG!"*