

LETTER SOUNDS AND PHONICS

WHAT IS PHONICS?

When a child learns phonics, he is learning that letters and combinations of letters make certain sounds.

WHY ARE PHONICS SKILLS IMPORTANT?

In order to learn to read and spell, children need to know the sounds of the letters. Since some letters make more than one sound, phonics can be confusing for some children. Direct, systematic instruction in phonics will be provided by your child's classroom teacher. Parents can reinforce letter sounds at home.

Children who have strong phonics skills demonstrate better literacy growth.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP LETTER SOUND AND PHONICS SKILLS

It's important not to introduce too many new, unknown letter sounds to your child at once. Ask your child's teacher which letters he or she would like your child to work on. A "rule of thumb" is to work on a mixture of known and unknown letter sounds—usually 8 "knowns" and 2 "unknowns" in a practice set.

- Make letter-sounds and have your children write the letter or letters that match the sounds.
- Play word games that connect sounds with syllables and words (for example, if the letters "p-e-n" spell *pen*, how do you spell *hen*?).
- Write letters on cards. Hold up the cards one at a time and have your children say the sounds (for example, the /d/ sound for the letter *d*).
- Teach your child to match the letters in their names with the sounds in their names.
- Point out words that begin with the same letter as your children's names (for example, *John* and *jump*). Talk about how the beginning sounds of the words are alike.
- Use alphabet books and guessing games to give your children practice in matching letters and sounds. A good example is the game, "I am thinking of something that starts with /t/."
- Write letters on pieces of paper and put them in a paper bag. Let your children reach into the bag and take out letters. Have them say the sounds

that match the letters.

- Take a letter and hide it in your hand. Let your child guess in which hand is the letter. Then show the letter and have your children say the letter name and make the sound (for example, the letter *m* matches the /m/ sound as in *man*).
- Make letter-sounds and ask your children to draw the matching letters in cornmeal or sand.
- Take egg cartons and put a paper letter in each slot until you have all the letters of the alphabet in order. Say letter-sounds and ask your children to pick out the letters that match those sounds.
- Play Letter Bingo! It's just like regular bingo, but each square has a letter and the caller calls out the sound. You can make your own or there is a commercial game available called Quizmo. You can also find an online Bingo template at: <http://www.2020site.org/templates/Bingo-Card-Template.pdf>
- Cut out a big letter out of construction paper. Have your child glue on pictures from a magazine that start with that letter's sound and make a collage.
- Make little letter books. Put a letter on the cover and on each page have your child draw a picture that starts with that letter. You can find a mini-book template to cut out and draw on at:
<http://www.epuzzled.net/PDF%20files/tiny%20book%20blank%20.pdf>
- Sort pictures into piles. For example, put all the pictures that start with an /s/ sound into one pile. Write the letter S on paper to label this pile.
- Play Alphabet Uh-Oh! To prepare for this activity, make flashcards of the letters your child is working on. Then make 4 or 5 flashcards that say "Uh-oh!" on them. Put all the cards in a bag. Or, you can print off ready-made game cards at:
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson132/uh-oh-cards.pdf

Take turns with the child drawing out a card. Whoever draws a card can say the letter name, the sound it makes, or a word that starts with that letter. If the player is correct, he or she keeps the card. If the player draws an Uh-Oh! Card, he or she must put all the letter cards back in the bag. The Uh-Oh! Card can be put aside and is out of play. Play until all of the letter cards are out of the bag. The player with the most cards wins.