

# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... PHONEMIC AWARENESS



## WHAT IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to manipulate individual sounds in our language. (Think: taking the word *cat* and being able to say the sounds *c-a-t*.)

## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

To build your child's phonemic awareness, play with sounds!

Examples:

1. Say the sounds in a simple word (*mat*, *cop*, *cash*, etc) and ask them to put the sounds together and tell you the word.
2. Do the reverse! Tell your child a word, and ask them to give you the sounds.
3. If your child is struggling to do this out loud, use blocks, chips, coins, etc. to represent each sound. Have them touch a block for each sound in the word.

## WHAT IS TAPPING SOUNDS?

Tapping your sounds means touching something each time you say a sound. For example, when I say *cat*, I can touch three blocks and say /c/-/a/-/t/. I can also just hold up a finger for each new sound. This helps students to see and understand how many sounds a word represents.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge are the two biggest indicators of how well a child will learn to read in the first two years of school.

If we can teach children to play with sounds, and then teach them the letters that go with those sounds, then they have a great chance of being successful in school

## IT DOESN'T END WITH SOUNDS!

While it's important to play with sounds, it doesn't end there. Phonemic awareness should be taught with letters as soon as possible. Once your child knows most of the sounds that letters make, you can start adding them in!

So, when you are asking children to spell a word like *mop*, ask them to repeat the word and then say the sounds. Before they spell the word, have them draw a line for each sound they hear. As they are spelling the word, ask them to say each sound as they spell.

# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... SPELLING



## DOES SPELLING REALLY MATTER? AREN'T SOME PEOPLE JUST BORN TO BE POOR SPELLERS?

You may have heard that spelling doesn't really matter. After all, we all have spell-check, right? But did you know that you have to be able to spell at about a 5th grade reading level in order for spell check to be effective?

Spelling is important, and children are not destined to be poor spellers. All spelling can improve.

When thinking about spelling, it is important to remember this: spelling is about matching the sounds (phonemes) in our language, to the symbols (graphemes) that match those sounds.

## WHAT IS TAPPING SOUNDS?

Tapping your sounds means touching something each time you say a sound. For example, when I say cat, I can touch three blocks and say /c/-/a/-/t/. I can also just hold up a finger for each new sound. This helps students to see and understand how many sounds must be represented in a word.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

Top tip: When your child is spelling, have them do the following:

1. Say the word.
2. Tap the sounds in the word (If the word is wish, they'd say /w/-/i/-/sh/.)
3. Say the sounds as they spell.

This one simple tip can give you BIG payout when it comes to spelling.

Top tip for more advanced spellers: When your child is spelling, have them do the following:

1. Say the word.
2. Tap the syllables. (Ex: Operation would be op-er-a-tion.)
3. Draw a line for each syllable.
4. Say the sounds as they spell.

# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... LEARNING SOUNDS



## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Knowing letter sounds is crucial for reading and spelling success. Without knowing letter sounds automatically, children will struggle in all areas of reading.

## WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG?

You may find yourself feeling frustrated because it is taking so long to learn sounds: trust me, I know it can feel defeating. But did you know that it takes hundreds of exposures to a letter before the sound sticks? Some children may pick up on it quickly, but it is not out of the ordinary for it to take many, many exposures before your child remembers their sounds.

## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

Tips for learning letter sounds:

1. Teach the name and the sound at the same time- they do not have to know all of their letter names before they learn their sounds. For example, teach children that the name is t and the sound it represents is /t/.
2. Practice multiple times in the day, but in short chunks. You can keep letters on the refrigerator and point out a few letters multiple times a day. (Think 1 minute!)
3. Play games! There are so many prepackaged games out there, but you can also easily make your own. I take blank notecards and write letters on them. I put them facedown and ask my daughter to find matching pairs.
4. Teach proper letter formation from the start. Use lined paper that has a dotted midline. The smaller the lines, the harder it is to form the letters.

## B DOES NOT SAY BUH!

When we discuss letter sounds, it can be natural to say things like b says "buh" and t says "tuh." The truth is, though, that saying "uh" with a sound is actually adding an additional sound. Try to "clip" your sounds--pay attention that when you are speaking, you're not adding the "uh" sound to the end!

# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... SIGHT WORDS/HEART WORDS/ HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS



## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There can be a lot of terms thrown around, so let's clarify the two biggest terms we hear:

**Sight word:** Any word that we recognize automatically, without having to sound it out.

**High-frequency word:** A word that appears often in text.

## DON'T THEY JUST NEED TO MEMORIZE CERTAIN WORDS?

There are certain words where the sounds don't match the letters. Don't children just need to memorize those words? Nope!

The truth is, we don't memorize words by just looking at them. It's a much deeper process called orthographic mapping. In simple terms, orthographic mapping is when we match the sounds we hear in a word to the letters that make those sounds. When a child can do that, they can automatically read a word.

## HOW CAN I HELP?

Instead of memorizing sight words, let's use the heart word method!

When reading a word that "doesn't play fair," try pointing out the parts of the word that do make sense! Then, tell your child the sounds of the letters that aren't playing by the rules.

Example: From has 4 sounds. 3 of those sounds play fair! The only sound that doesn't is the o making the /u/ sound. So, we say the sounds that do play fair, and then put a heart above the part that doesn't (to let them know we must learn it by heart!)

from

Example: Said has 3 sounds. 2 of those sounds play fair! The only sound that doesn't is ai making /eh/ sound. So, we say the sounds that do play fair, and then put a heart above the part that doesn't (to let them know we must learn it by heart!)

said

# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... HANDWRITING



## PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT, NOT PERFECT.

When it comes to handwriting, it is important to make sure that students are forming their letters correctly. If you see your child forming a letter incorrectly, immediately stop and model proper letter formation.

## WHAT IF I'M NOT SURE THE "PROPER" WAY?

It can be difficult to help your child with their letter formation if no one ever taught you the proper formation. Please scan the QR code below to see a video of how each letter is created.



## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

1. Ask your child to write the ABCs (lowercase) for you. In general, we want them to accurately write the alphabet in 30 seconds by the end of second grade.
2. Correct errors when you see them. A gentle, "Great job, but let me show you the fastest way to make that letter!" is appropriate.
3. When practicing handwriting, make sure that your child does not include uppercase letters in the middle of words. If you see that, it may be an indication that they aren't certain how to properly form the lowercase letter.
4. Think about teaching letters together that are formed similarly. c, a, g, o, d, and q all start the same way!

## CONSIDERATIONS

1. Use paper that has a midline (a dotted line) to help guide their letter formation. For beginning writers, paper that has pictures to represent each line may also help.
2. Make sure your child has proper pencil grip. There are a variety of affordable options you can purchase (search for pencil grips) to assist. Remember, though, we don't want them to use a pencil grip forever.

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# HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD WITH... DECODABLES



## WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

### WHAT ARE DECODABLES?

A decodable text is a text where the words have been controlled for specific phonics skills. It will include multiple words around a skill, such as ai, ee, ch, sh, etc.

Unlike a leveled text or a typical picture book, these texts are designed so that children can successfully read each word. They are an important step in learning to read.

1. Every time your child reads a text, give them a sticker to put on the page (or ask them to write a tally mark). Let them read any text they want, but you will eventually need to "nudge" them to read some texts that don't have many stickers or tally marks!!
2. Have your child highlight the target skills. The target skill is listed at the top. If the skill is ch, they would highlight all the words with the letters ch. Ask your child to read just the words highlighted, before reading the entire passage.
3. Try different ways of reading. You could do an echo read (you read a line, they repeat), choral reading (you read together), or have your child read on their own.

### DON'T THEY NEED REAL BOOKS?

You might look at a decodable and think, "This isn't really reading! Children need to read real books!" Let me start by saying the end goal will always be for children to read whatever book they want! But just like we wouldn't expect children to do long division without first learning their basic facts, we can't ask children to read those books independently without giving them lots of practice in basic phonics skills. Decodables may seem boring to us as adults. But for a child who is still trying to learn to read, they are fantastic practice.

Reading authentic stories with and to your child will always be a valuable practice. Those books can help with comprehension and building a shared love of reading.

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