

Early sound awareness

Developing early sound awareness skills in pre-school children

What is early sound awareness?

Sound awareness involves your child's understanding of sounds in words, syllables and rhyme. These aspects are an important part of speech and language development and they can be acquired from an early age. These skills are an essential basis for your child to acquire further skills as they get older. Studies have shown a link between good early sound awareness and good literacy skills.

Why do parents need to be involved in early sound awareness?

At nursery/preschool, your child will no doubt spend time learning about sound awareness; however it is crucial to also remember that pre-school children actually spend a lot of their time with their parents. Therefore, you play an essential role in developing your child's early sound awareness.

What can parents do to help their child to develop these skills?

Fun, play based activities are an excellent way to help your child to develop skills in sound awareness. These activities are described below.

Rhyme

- Sing a nursery rhyme, e.g. twinkle twinkle little star. When you are singing the song, pause when you get to the word that rhymes which will encourage your child to say the word.
- There are many books aimed at pre school children that aim to increase their awareness of rhyme. The books are often full of exciting pictures which make them motivating for children. If you are able to find a rhyming book, read this with your child. When reading the book, emphasise the words that rhyme.

Copying

- Encourage your child to copy you making sounds. Using a mirror, make a mixture of real and silly sounds, exaggerate the sounds and ask your child to make the sound too. Ask your child to think about where the sound is made, e.g. at the front or the back of the mouth, if it is made with the lips or the tongue and ask them whether it was a long or a short sound. Easier sounds to say are p, b, m, w. Sounds like k, g, f, sh, th are more difficult.

Syllables

- Select some one/two syllable items. Say the word to your child, using bricks to represent the number of syllables in the word. The first time you do this activity; you may need to model how you can tap the number of syllables onto the brick, e.g. 'dog' has one syllable and therefore is one tap on the brick. After a few examples, you should be able to say the word to your child, and they tap on the bricks. Reinforce how many syllables are in the word by tapping on the brick after your child. You can vary this activity by using noisy instruments instead of bricks, e.g. a wooden spoon on a box.

Sounds in words

- Put some one syllable items in a bag and ask your child to pick one out of the bag. Say what the word is, putting emphasis on the first sound and ask your child what the first sound was. Do not correct them if they say the sound wrong; just model how it should be said.