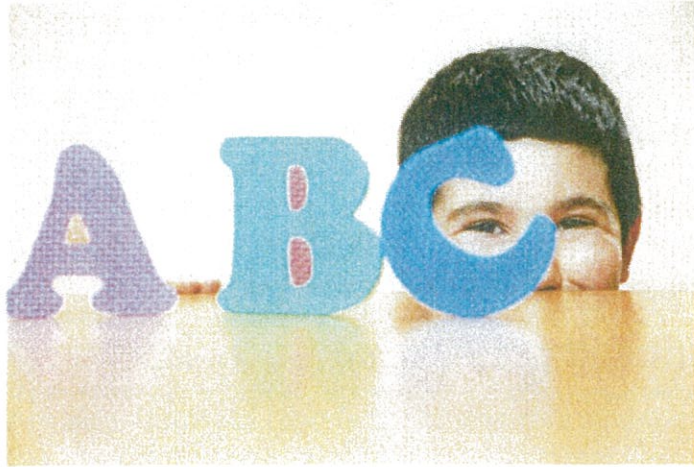


Phonics: helping your child with letters and sounds



At a glance

- Phonics is about making the connections between printed letters and speech sounds.
- Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and say the sounds in words.
- Phonics and phonemic awareness connect when kids read and spell.
- Help your child learn letter names and say the sounds they make.
- Identify letters and words in signs, posters, etc, and talk about the sounds that different letters make.

For decades now, phonics has been the subject of great public debate. It seems everyone has an opinion on it, so much so that a host of myths and half truths have arisen.

While experts argue about how much emphasis should be placed on phonics instruction in classrooms, just about all agree the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness is critical to children learning to read.

What are phonics and phonemic awareness?

Phonics is about making the connections between printed letters (and combinations of letters) and speech sounds. For example, kids show their phonics knowledge when they are asked to point to the letter 'm' and make the sound.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and say the sounds in words. For example, kids show their phonemic awareness when they listen for and say the three sounds they hear when the teacher says "mat".

Help your child learn letter names and say the sounds they make.

Phonics and phonemic awareness connect when kids read and spell. Phonemic awareness helps kids to understand and use the alphabet to read and spell.

Phonics is only part of the picture

At school, learning about phonics is never the whole reading program. Good early literacy programs at your child's school use:

- phonics
- phonemic awareness
- vocabulary knowledge
- comprehension
- writing
- speaking
- concepts about print, and
- fluent reading.

Kids need frequent opportunities to practise and apply their developing phonics knowledge and skills. This can include:

- moving their bodies to make letter shapes
- tracing words and letters with fingers in the air or with sticks in sand
- tapping out phonemes (the smallest unit of sounds)

- using an interactive whiteboard at school to manipulate words and letters.

Helping your child to have fun with letters and sounds

1. Read with your child every day – read to them, read with them and let them read to you.
2. Help your child learn letter names and say the sounds they make, eg play letter/sound games, say rhymes, use alphabet cards and charts.
3. Help your child identify letters and words in signs, posters, etc, and talk about the sounds that different letters make.
4. Encourage your child to hear and say the sounds in words. Help them to listen for the individual sounds in words, pull them apart and put them together.
5. Ask your child to find letters that they can name, eg in their own name and in the names of family members and friends, or while shopping at the supermarket.
6. Play word games such as Junior Scrabble or Boggle or give them a baking tray with some magnetic letters.
7. Try writing cards to family and friends and lists of different events (birthdays) or items (shopping) together.



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