

The Importance of Sounds for Early Reading Development



Being able to recognise, name and write letters is important for children to know, however, when it comes to learning how to read there are some key skills that children need to be successful.

Reading English involves understanding that letters represent sounds. Children need to know what sound/s are represented by what letters, not just their names, so they can learn how to read new words. This skill is referred to as phonics.

Children learn to read by “Understanding that letters and letter clusters in written words represent the sounds in spoken words” (Buckingham, Wheldall & Wheldall, 2019). In other words, learning the alphabetic code - the links between sounds and letters - is key. Children also need to practice the skills of segmenting (breaking words into their sounds) and blending (joining sounds together to read a word) (Rose, 2006).

For example:

When reading a new word like 'dog', your child needs to know the sounds that letters 'd', 'o', and 'g' represent.


They would sound out each part — /d/ - /o/ - /g/ and then blend the sounds together to read the word 'dog'.

This process is called decoding, and it's a crucial skill for learning to read confidently.



How can you help at home?

The following ideas and games can help your child with their knowledge of sounds and other reading skills:

“I Spy”: 

→ Instead of using letter names, use the letter sounds.

→ “I spy something beginning with the /s/ (‘ssss’) sound.”

Sound Stretching: 

→ Say a word slowly and encourage your child to stretch the sounds. Then, have them blend it back together to say the word.

→ “Let’s say ‘cat’ slowly: /c/ ... /a/ ... /t/. Now, can you say it fast?”

Mystery Word: 

→ Say a word with the sounds separated, and your child guesses the word by blending the sounds together.

→ “I’ll say the sounds slowly: /s/ ... /u/ ... /n/. What word is that?” (Answer: sun).

These types of activities and games can support your child to listen to sounds, blend them together, and connect them to form words — all important early reading skills!

References

- Buckingham, J., Wheldall, K., & Wheldall, R. (2019). Systematic and explicit phonics instruction: A scientific, evidence-based approach to teaching the alphabetic principle. In R. Cox, S. Feez, & L. Beveridge (Eds.), *The alphabetic principle and beyond: Surveying the landscape* (pp. 49–70). Primary English Teaching Association Australia.
- Rose, J. (2006). Independent review of the teaching of early reading final report. UK. Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf>