

Additional Activities for Parents to Increase Children's Print Awareness and Phonological Awareness

The activities listed below are arranged from easier to harder, in order that skills are learned by young children. It is important to begin activities with children at a level that is not too hard for them. Some activities start at a very simple level and can be extended to more complex skills. Parents should be sure that their children can perform the task at the simpler level before moving on to the higher level.

It is most important to keep the activities fun. Do not overload a child by attempting too many of the different activities at once. Focus on one or two of the activities first and experiment to discover which activities are most enjoyable for you and your child.

1. Have your child draw pictures or glue pictures cut out from magazines onto paper. Have him or her tell a "story" about the picture as you write what he or she says. You can teach new words at this time but the focus should be on drawing the child's attention to the printed word. After the story is written go back and take turns "reading" the story to each other. Collect these pictures and stories and make them into a book that can be looked at again and again.
2. Teach your child simple Nursery Rhymes. After he or she can say the rhyme and is very familiar with it, practice counting the words in one sentence at a time. The focus should be on teaching your child about sentences and words -- that sentences are made up of words. If your child cannot count yet then use blocks to represent words and build a tower as you say the rhyme, with one block added with each word spoken.
After your child can do this activity based on words move to counting syllables and then individual sounds in words.
3. Use a set of rhyming picture cards and practice categorizing the rhyming words. If your child has trouble matching rhyming words, provide help by drawing attention to the fact that words that rhyme have the same sound at the end. For example, "cat" and "rat" rhyme because they both have the "at" sound at the end; "clock" and "block" rhyme because they both have the "ock" sound at the end (emphasize the ending that makes the words rhyme when saying them). Adding some examples that do not rhyme may help your child understand (e.g., "clock" and "ball" do not rhyme because they have different ending sounds).
4. Make up "silly" words by changing the first letter in a word. Play a game of seeing how many "silly" words you and your child can create and then have your child tell you whether or not the "silly" word is a real word or not. To play this game at the easiest level, you should make up several words by changing the first sound (e.g., cook, book, took, mook, look) and then asking your child whether or not it is a real word.

At a more advanced level, you can model and ask your child to change the first sound in a word from one word to another. For example, say “my word is ‘be’ and the new sound is /m/ (say the sound, not the word). What is the new word?” (‘me’). There are lots of familiar words that the first sound can be changed to make a new word (light - night, boat - goat, pail - sail, cat - rat, ball - wall).

5. Play a game of saying a familiar rhyme or familiar word incorrectly by changing one sound in a word. Have your child tell you if you said it correctly or not. If it was incorrect explain why. For example, “‘Mary had a little bamb’ -- is that correct?” “No, why?” “Because I said ‘b – amb and I should say l-amb.” I said a “B” sound but “lamb” has an “L” sound.” Next have your child practice saying the sounds and hearing the difference.
6. Use a set of picture cards (or make them using 3x5 cards and pictures cut from magazines) and group them by the first sound in the word. The words you use should be simple and familiar to your child. Be sure that the printed word appears on the card so that you can point out that they all start with same letter. At first, use only two sounds. Later, after your child is better at this task you can increase the number of sounds to categorize. Finally, you can make the game involve many sounds by playing “go fish” with the initial sounds of words. Create a shuffled “deck” from the picture cards (making sure that there are at least two of each beginning sound). Give you and your child each five to seven cards and then take turns trying to create pairs by asking the other player if her or his hand includes a card with a specific first sound (e.g., “Do you have a /b/?”). When the player has that card, the opponent gets to create a pair; otherwise, the opponent gets to “go fish” for a match in the deck. Continue the game until one player has eliminated all of the cards in her or his hand. The player with the most pairs wins.