



Phonemic Awareness

What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words. Children must first understand that words are made up of separate speech sounds that can be blended together to make words before they can make sense of using the alphabet to read and write. Research has identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the best two predictors of how well a child will learn to read during the first two years of school (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children who develop strong phonemic awareness skills at an early age are more likely to become fluent readers and better spellers than children who do not.

What should my first grader be able to do?

By the middle of first grade, children should be able to:

- Identify the beginning, middle and ending sounds in words (“What is the last sound in the word ‘cat’?” Child: /t/)
- Blend 3-4 phonemes (sounds) into a whole word (/s/ /a/ /m/, Child: “sam”)
- Segment 3-4 phonemes in a one-syllable word (“map”, Child: /m/ /a/ /p/)

By the end of first grade/beginning of second grade, children should be able to:

- Substitute a sound in a word (“Sat. What word do we get when we change the /s/ to /p/?” Child: “pat”)
- Delete a sound in a word (“Frog. What word do we get when we take away the /r/?” Child: “fog”)
- Add a sound to a word (“What word do we get when we add /b/ to the beginning of ‘rake’?” Child: “brake”)

How can I help my child develop phonemic awareness skills?

To help your child blend sounds to make words:

- Have your child guess a word that you sound out slowly (ssssssuuuuunnnnn).
- Give your child a small car (such as a Matchbox car). Write a 3-4 letter word on a piece of paper with the letters spaced apart. Have your child drive the car over each letter saying the letter sound. Have your child begin driving the car slowly over the letters and then drive over them again slightly faster. Continue until the word is said at a good rate.

To help your child segment (separate) sounds in words:

- Give your child 3-5 blocks, beads, bingo chips or similar items. Say a word and have your child move an object for each sound in the word.
- Play Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes with sounds. Say a word and have your child touch his/her head for the first sound, shoulders for the second sound, and knees for the third while saying each sound.
- Jump for Sounds. Say a word and have your child jump for each sound in the word while saying the sound.

