

Raising Readers: Tips for Parents



What is Phonics?

Adapted from: Elish-Piper L. (2009/2010). Information and Ideas for parents about phonemic awareness and phonics. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 31(1), 52-54

Phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds. Readers use phonics to decode or sound out unknown words. For example, when a reader comes to a word they don't know, they can decode the word letter by letter such as in the example "big" where they would identify the sounds /b/ /i/ /g/ to read the word "big." Other words may have chunks or patterns that they can use to figure out unknown words. For example, when they come to the word "jump" they may identify the sound /j/ and then the familiar chunk /ump/ that they know from other words such as "bump," "lump" and "dump."

Children usually learn beginning sounds first, short vowels next and then three letter words such as "cat," "sit" and "map." Next, children learn about the silent "e" that comes at the end of words and makes a vowel a long vowel, meaning that the vowel says its own name such as /a/ in the word "tape." Children also learn about other long vowel patterns as well as blends such as the letters /tr/ /br/ and /cl/.

Even if parents do not understand all of the phonics rules and patterns, they can still help their children develop phonics skills. Here are 10 fun, easy activities that parents and children can do to practice phonics skills at home.



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What Can Parents Do to Promote Phonics at Home?

1. Read to and with your child as often as possible. Talk about words, letters and sounds. For example, ask your child, “What words do you see on this page that start with the same letter as your name?” Or ask, “What is the beginning sound in the word ‘car’?” Or, point out, “Look; that word has the chunk /ip/ in it. What sounds does that chunk make?”
2. Make letters in fun ways such as in clay, play-dough or sand and talk about the sound each letter makes and the sounds they make when they are combined.
3. Look for letters in your house or neighborhood. Point out and talk about the letters you see and the sounds they make as you read words on signs, labels, menus and the TV.
4. Make words with magnetic letters and then add or change one letter to make a new word. For example, begin with the word “car” and add a /t/ to the end to make the new word “cart” then take off the /c/ and replace it with a /d/ to make the word “dart” and so on. See how many new words you and your child can make.
5. Have your child use phonics to help you look for items at the grocery store. Ask them to find the “corn” by looking for the word on the labels. Have your child read the label to make sure that they have found the right item.
6. Writing is a great way to practice phonics skills with your child. Have your child help you write a shopping list, birthday card or an email.
7. Practice chunks, sometimes called spelling patterns or rimes, with your child. This list of 37 chunks can be used to read and spell over 500 words! Point out these chunks as you read and write with your child. You can also write as many words as you can think of for each chunk. For example, if the chunk is “ack,” you and your child might think of and write: “back,” “hack,” “jack,” “pack,” “rack,” “tack,” “black,” “crack” and “snack.” Here are the 37 chunks:

ack	ain	ake	ale	all	ame	an
ank	ap	ash	at	ate	aw	ay
eat	ell	est	ice	ick	ide	ight
ill	in	ine	ing	ink	ip	ir
ock	oke	op	or	ore	uck	ug
ump	unk					
8. Go on a hunt for certain letters, sounds or chunks. For example, look through a magazine, book or ad with your child to find the letter /s/ or the blend /cr/ in words.
9. Play word games such as Boggle Jr., Scrabble Jr., Spill and Spell, or What’s Gnu. These games are fun for the whole family and can be purchased at most discount stores. Some libraries also have word games that can be checked out or used at the library.
10. The TV program Between the Lions on PBS can help your child learn and practice phonics skills. This show also has a free website with games, puzzles and video clips at pbskids.org/lions.

We’re here to help

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