

How can you help your little one's phonological awareness?



First, children learn how to identify separate words, e.g., 'rainyday' contains two words: 'rainy-day'. Then children learn to separate words into syllables, e.g., 'ba-na-na' contains three syllables. Finally, children break down these syllables into speech sounds, e.g., 'dog' contains 'd-o-g'. This is **phonological awareness**: an important building block for clear speech and learning to read and write.

As children learn to talk, they start to understand that words are made up of different sounds.

c-a-t → 'cat'

How does this help children develop their speech and language skills?

Phonological awareness helps children to recognise a word from their home language, and to distinguish between Welsh and English for example. This also helps them to correct their own mistakes if they get a sound wrong, and to understand words which sound similar. These skills are important for children to develop clear speech and get their messages across.

Phonological awareness also helps children when they are learning to read and write. If they understand which sounds come first and last in a word, they can recognise the word when it is written down. For example, if they know the sounds in 'sh-ee-p', this might help them recognise the word 'sheep' in a book.

How can I help day to day?

- Do lots of talking! Using lots of words in your little one's daily environment can speed up their sound development.
- Break words down into syllables or beats. Try starting with words made up of two words that your little one already knows, like 'snow-ball' or 'hair-brush'. Then work up to more complicated words, like 'ti-ger', 'com-pu-ter', or 'he-li-cop-ter'. You can find things to 'clap out' while on a walk, looking at a book, or playing together.
- Your little one might enjoy a treasure hunt for their favourite toys. You can make sure to clap along to the syllables every time you find an item.

- Clapping along to syllables in simple sentences can help raise your little one's awareness of sounds. For example, clap along to 'a big car' or 'I want tea please'. Start with words that have one syllable and show your little one how to do it in case they want to try too. Sometimes having something to look at can help with this. Why not pick up a counter for every syllable or jump across lily pads drawn with chalk?
- How can you help your child's sound awareness at home? Start by noticing how many syllables are in the words you speak. If your child says, "it's a football": you could say this back and clap along: "yes, foot-ball, football has two parts so I did two claps".
- Start to notice words that rhyme in your daily talking. You might say "look the cat is sat on the chair, cat and sat sound the almost the same, they rhyme".
- 'Deleting' syllables is a stepping stone to better sound awareness. For example, show your little one that 'rain-bow' has two beats and practise taking away the first syllable: "if I don't say 'rain', it's just 'bow'".

References

Stringer, H. (2019). The Newcastle Intervention for Phonological Awareness (NIPA). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Newcastle University, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences).