

## ***Ready to read?***

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There is much controversy regarding the age a child should learn to read. I strongly believe that it is more important to develop a child's early literacy skills before teaching him to read formally. These pre-literacy skills include many aspects of development, but the area that Speech-Language Therapists focus on is referred to as phonemic awareness. This is simply the ability to hear sounds in words and understand how these sounds work.

Research has shown that a child who has well-established phonological skills will develop better literacy skills at school. Phonological awareness has been shown to be a better predictor of reading success than performance on intelligence tests.

These skills can be developed through games, reading stories and incidental learning experiences at home and at school. So many foundational skills need to be established before a child is given flash cards and required to learn to read the words. By developing your child's phonological skills in a fun, exciting way; you are giving your child the necessary auditory strategies to assist him to read at a later stage. I believe that by teaching your children these skills you will give your child "the wings to fly" in school.

Phonological skills should be encouraged informally during the pre-school years. "Proper reading" should take place when a child has developed the necessary auditory perceptual and visual perceptual pre-literacy skills. If a 5 year old child shows an interest in learning to read, I don't believe one should hold that child back. Most children seem to be more ready to learn to read competently between 6 and 7 years.

### ***Foundational skills for literacy:***

#### ***1. Naming the letters of the alphabet***

Expose your child to familiar printed words and identify the letters by their correct names. In order to spell a word effectively a child needs to know the names of the letters that occur in that word. Alphabet puzzles, blocks, magnetic letters and foam letters are all fun ways to introduce your child to the 26 letters of the alphabet.

#### ***2. Identifying the sounds that letters represent.***

In addition to children naming the 26 letters, they should also become familiar with the 44 sounds in English i.e. most letters do not make one sound e.g. 'c' makes a /k/ sound in cat and a /s/ sound in ceiling. It is important to make your child aware of the different sounds that letters and letter combinations

can make. Children are used to recognising the names of their friends and this is a useful place to start to show them how letters represent different sounds e.g Charlotte- the 'ch' is making a /sh/ sound, Christopher- the 'ch' is making a /k/ sound etc.

This is a critical step to develop in the reading process. If a child is unable to recognise a letter and identify the sound (or sounds) that it represents, he will struggle to learn to read.

Choose a letter of the alphabet and write the letter on a brown paper bag. Collect items around the house that begin with that sound. Remember to isolate the beginning sound only i.e. when saying /b/, don't say /ba/, as you are then adding a vowel sound. Start with easy sounds that can be prolonged or 'stretched' i.e. /m/, /r/, /s/, /f/

### **3. Segmenting words into syllables**

Children should learn that sentences are made up of separate words and that words can be broken into syllables and eventually into sounds.

Play games to clap the syllables in words or beat a drum to represent each syllable i.e. mac-a-ro-ni

### **4. Blending words and sounds**

This crucial skill is often referred to as auditory synthesis. A child learns to blend words together first. Once he is competent doing this, he will learn to blend syllables i.e. wheel-ba-rrow and finally to blend sounds. Without this skill, reading will be very difficult.

Start with 2 words that can be blended to make a compound word e.g. rain+bow= rainbow. A 6 year old can start to blend 2 or 3 letters e.g. m-e= me or c-a-t = cat

### **5. Rhyming**

This seems to be a skill that many children are no longer familiar with and yet it is such a necessary pre-literacy skill to develop. It allows your child to learn to "play" with sounds and to recognise ending sound patterns.

Read books like "Dr. Seuss" to your child and emphasise the words that rhyme. Match rhyming words, think of your own rhyming words, complete Nursery Rhymes and make up your own silly rhymes.

## **6. Isolating sounds in words**

Play "I Spy" with your child in the car to encourage him to listen to and identify the beginning sound in words. Once he is confident with this, practise isolating the final sounds in words.

## **7. Discriminating between contrasting sounds**

A child needs to be able to differentiate between sounds in order to spell effectively.

Play musical instruments with your child and encourage him to identify loud/soft; high/low; fast/slow sounds. Listen to and identify environmental sounds. Make up silly sentences and ask your child to correct your mistakes.

### ***The implications of consolidating foundation skills:***

- Some children have excellent auditory and visual memory skills and seem to learn to read quickly. A child, however, can not rely solely on memory skills and if sufficient foundational skills have not been established, they will not develop the necessary strategies to assist them with spelling and reading.
- Difficulties may only manifest in the later grades. As the load and complexity of phonic work increases, children without phonological awareness and auditory perceptual strategies will struggle with their literacy.