

## Section 6: Phonological Awareness & Phonics

### Phonological Awareness and Phonics

Phonological Awareness is a child's ability to hear and work with the sounds in spoken words. It's a key skill that helps children learn to read and spell later.

Before children learn phonics (matching sounds to letters), they need to be able to hear and play with sounds in words. This includes:

- Hearing syllables (clapping out beats in a word)
- Recognising rhymes ('cat' and 'hat')
- Hearing individual sounds (phonemes) (the /b/, /a/, /t/ in 'bat')

Children with strong phonological awareness can:

- Blend sounds together to say a word (/c/, /a/, /t/ becomes 'cat')
- Break words (segment) into individual sounds ('cat' becomes /c/, /a/, /t/)
- Change sounds (manipulate) to make new words (change the /b/ in 'bat' to /h/ to make 'hat')

These skills help children read and spell more easily.

Some children - especially those with literacy or memory difficulties - may find this hard. For example:

- They might not be able to blend sounds like /p/, /e/, /n/ into 'pen'
- They might struggle to break up words into sounds when spelling

This can be because their working memory (the ability to hold and use information briefly) isn't strong enough to remember all the sounds at once.

They may also mix up sounds that are very similar:

| Sound 1 | Sound 2 |
|---------|---------|
| /f/     | /v/     |
| /m/     | /n/     |
| /p/     | /b/     |
| /t/     | /d/     |

Phonological Awareness is about understanding sounds in words. This includes:

- hear and make rhyme
- count syllables
- hear and change sounds in words
- join sounds into words
- split words into sounds

Phonics is about understanding how to connect these sounds we hear to the letter(s) we see in reading and writing. This includes:

- know all letter names
- say and sequence the alphabet
- match sounds to letters
- recognise syllables
- read whole words
- recognise onset and rime patterns

Children who find reading and writing difficult need lots of extra practice (overlearning) to help store this knowledge in long-term memory. They may read words more slowly, one sound at a time. They may not be able to recognise or break words into syllables, recognise patterns in words or recognise whole words. They may have poor reading fluency, difficulty putting sounds together to make words and this can impact confidence with reading.

Each letter has its own name, sound, shape and feel. The shape can change from upper case to lower case 'A' 'a'. Letters can have more than one sound: /c/ as in cat, /c/ as in circle.

Letter names always remain the same. This is why it is very important that children learn the names of all letters of the alphabet.

The alphabet arc is a useful tool for setting up the alphabet, practising sequencing, learning letter names and also establishing letter/sound knowledge.

## Section 6.1: Foundation Stage (Age 4-6) Phonological Awareness & Phonics

| Impact  | Practical Strategies  |
|---|---|
| May struggle pronouncing unfamiliar words or names  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stick to one or two unfamiliar words</li> <li>• Praise your child for trying, even if he/she can still not say the word</li> </ul>   |
| <p>May struggle to recite Nursery Rhymes</p> <p>May struggle to recognise and/or make rhyming words</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recite Nursery Rhymes to your child and leave out rhyming words and ask your child to finish the sentence, for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Baa, baa black sheep have you any _____</li> <li>○ Yes sir, yes sir, three bags _____</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Play 'match the rhyming pictures'</li> <li>• Play 'Odd word out' - Ask your child to spot the word that does not rhyme, for example dog, log, cat, fog</li> <li>• Ask your child to spot the word that does not start with the same sound as the others, for example, cat, car, cup, dog</li> <li>• Pick a sound and take turns to say a word beginning with that sound, for example, /b/ - ball, bat, banana</li> </ul> |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take turns to make up silly sentences, for example, 'Sam's silly snakes', or 'Lilly's little ladybird'</li> <li>• <a href="#">Language and Communication   SEND Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Book ideas for parents (eani.org.uk)</a></li> </ul>   |
| <p>May have difficulty breaking words into syllables, for example, cardboard into card/board</p> <p>May have difficulty saying words with lots of syllables accurately</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say the word slowly for your child to repeat. Break it into chunks, for example, spa/ghet/ti</li> <li>• Encourage your child to use one of the skills below that works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clapping</li> <li>○ Tapping the syllables on his/her arm</li> <li>○ Holding hand under chin and counting the number of times the chin hits the hand</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">EA Cognition &amp; Learning - Literacy Newsletter Issue 9: Phonics</a></li> </ul> |
| <p>May have difficulty discriminating sounds, for example, /m/ and /n/ or /d/ and /t/</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play 'I Spy' using letter sounds instead of letter names</li> <li>• Ask your child to watch your mouth as you make the sounds, then let your child look in a mirror and copy what you did</li> </ul>  |
| <p>May struggle to say the alphabet and put the letters in the correct order and say which letter comes next in the sequence</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break the alphabet into sections, for example, a-g, h-m, n-t, u-z and practise until secure. Continue to practise until a-z is secure</li> <li>• Sing the 'alphabet song' with your child, check that your child sings it correctly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">EA Cognition &amp; Learning - Literacy Newsletter Issue 5: Alphabet &amp; Dictionary Work</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep practising and repeating ordering the alphabet until the knowledge is secure</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Teacher Guidance: Alphabet Arc Activities   Literacy Inclusion Toolkit</u></a></li> <li>• Provide your child with sets of cards: AB_, BC_ etc. Ask “What comes next?”</li> </ul>   |
| <p>May have difficulty learning the connection between letters and sounds</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use flashcards with the capital and lowercase letter on one side and a clue picture on the other. Add one at a time until your child can name all 26 letters and provide the sounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#"><u>EA Cognition &amp; Learning - Literacy Newsletter Issue 5: Alphabet &amp; Dictionary Work</u></a></li> <li>○ <a href="#"><u>Teacher Guidance: Alphabet Arc Activities   Literacy Inclusion Toolkit</u></a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Show how letters are formed using the handwriting routine for joined up (cursive) writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#"><u>EA Guidance Video: Handwriting Routine (2:27 mins)</u></a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Stimulus Response Routine - provides a repetitive approach which may make your child more confident in learning the new sound: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#"><u>EA Guidance Video: Stimulus Response Routine (1:51 mins)</u></a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p>May find it difficult to recognise newly learned short vowel sounds</p>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your child's teacher to share the strategies taught in school</li> <li>• Use a curved alphabet layout (a rainbow arc) and help your child to make simple words,</li> </ul>   |

join a vowel with a consonant. For example, t-in, p-at, m-et, p-up, c-ot. This is a great visual way to show your child how letters work together

- Use real objects to match with vowel sounds. For example, apple for the sound /a/, umbrella for the sound /u/. Touching and seeing the objects helps remember the sounds
- Use simple actions to make vowel sounds stick
- Vowel 'a' - move your hand from left to right in front of your body like you are holding an apple and say 'apple' like this /aaapple/
- Vowel 'e' - move your hand along the edge of the table and say 'edge' like this /eeedge/
- Vowel 'i' - scratch the back of your hand and say 'itch' like this /iitch/
- Model how to 'make and break,' words. Once your child knows a few sounds show how to swap letters to make a new word. E.g. change the first sound /c/ in 'cat' to /m/ and make 'mat'. Try changing the last letter /t/ in the word 'cat' to /p/ to make 'cap'
- Show your child word patterns using magnetic letters, for example, cat, mat, sat. Use a consistent colour for the rime and the onset colour can be changed, for example, **cat, mat**
- Teach word patterns - words that end in the same rime - et, ip, ug or have the same initial blend such as bl or cr

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise blending and segmenting the sounds in common rimes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a rimes: ab, ad, ag, am, an, ap, at</li> <li>○ e rimes: eb, ed, eg, en, ep, et</li> <li>○ i rimes: ib, id, ig, im, in, ip, it</li> <li>○ o rimes: ob, od, og, om, on, op, ot</li> <li>○ u rimes: ub, ud, ug, um, un</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| <p>May confuses similar letters (for example <b>b/d</b>, <b>p/q</b>)</p>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visuals to remind of direction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#"><u>Printable Resources: Letter Orientation Prompt   Literacy Inclusion Toolkit</u></a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| <p>May struggle to read letters as one sound, for example, /sp/ as in 'spit' or /nt/ as in 'sent'</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use flashcards with the blend on one side and a clue picture on the other. Start with a few and add one at a time. Do not always give the cards in the same order: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consonant Blends are two sounds blended together at the beginning and end of words <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ beginning blends - (bl, fl, cl, pl, gl sl,) (pr, tr, cr, fr, br, dr) (sp, st, sc, sm, sn, sw, tw) (str, scr, spr, spl)</li> <li>▪ end blends - (ng, nk, nt, nd, lk, lf)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p>May struggle to read one sound written as 2 letters, for example, /sh/ as in 'shop'</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use flashcards with the blend on one side and a clue picture on the other</li> <li>• Consonant Digraphs, two or more letters that come together and make one sound, for example - /sh/, /ch/, /th/</li> </ul>  |
| <p>May struggle to read words and sounds out every letter,</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind your child and say "you know the word, so say the word"</li> </ul>  |

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| even when he/she knows the word  |  |
| May have poor reading fluency  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read to your child</li> <li>• Take turns reading alternate pages</li> <li>• Paired and Shared reading</li> <li>• Echo reading – you read a sentence and your child repeats as an echo</li> <li>• Choral reading – read together at the same time</li> </ul> |
| May spell a word using the wrong choice of sound for example, 'kat' instead of 'cat' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at word patterns repeatedly to store in memory</li> </ul>  |
| May sound out words which should be known, for example, 'in' or 'and'                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read these words by using flashcards and say, "if you know the word, say the word"</li> </ul>   |

## Section 6.2: Primary Stage (Age 7-11) Phonological Awareness & Phonics

| Impact   | Practical Strategies  |
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| May struggle separating spoken words into sounds                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model the word slowly in a robot voice for e.g. /p/, /i/, /n/. Ask your child to sound out aloud each sound in the word: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use your fingers to count each sound in the word e.g. hold up 3 fingers and point to each finger for each sound in the word /d/, /o/, /g/</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| May not be able to blend sounds together to make words, for example, put the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your child's teacher to share the strategies that are taught in class</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>letters /c/, /a/, /t/ together and say the word 'cat'</p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise changing the first sound in words using magnetic letters e.g. change 'pat' to 'rat', change 'pat' to 'chat'</li> <li>• Introduce word families and show words with similar rime pattern - sit, fit, hit. Encourage your child to recognise whole words</li> <li>• Introduce words with 2 letters before the vowel, e.g. <b>flip</b>, <b>flop</b>, <b>flap</b>, or 2 letters after the vowel, e.g. <b>sand</b>, <b>hand</b>, <b>land</b></li> <li>• Use a mirror when making a sound. E.g. "I am making the sound /a/. Can you say /a/ too? Look in the mirror. Tell me what shape your mouth is making?"</li> <li>• <a href="#"><u><b>EA Cognition &amp; Learning - Literacy Newsletter Issue 9: Phonics</b></u></a></li> </ul> |
| <p>May have difficulty hearing and distinguishing sounds within words</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep in touch with your child's teacher to know what area of phonics to work on and what strategies are used</li> <li>• Help your child to notice word patterns</li> <li>• Follow a daily flashcard routine for overlearning. Flashcards help connect knowledge of letter and sound(s). They include a clue-word and picture to provide context and support your child's memory and recall. They can be used to build automaticity and fluency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#"><u><b>EA Guidance Video: Introduce the flashcard and flashcard routine (1:03 mins)</b></u></a></li> <li>○ <a href="#"><u><b>EA Guidance video: Reading in Structure single words (3.13)</b></u></a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>          |

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| May struggle to use newly learned vowel sounds to read and spell words | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise one vowel sound at a time in words that follow a pattern, for example, hat, mat, sat or hot, not, pot</li> <li>• Write the word containing the new sound (use cursive handwriting to develop the motor memory)</li> <li>• It is important for your child to say the letter name as he/she writes a letter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">EA Guidance Video: Simultaneous Oral Spelling (SOS) (4:39 mins)</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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### Section 6.3: Post Primary Stage (Age 11+) Phonological Awareness & Phonics

| Impact  | Practical Strategies  |
|---|---|
| May sometimes be unable to recognise if a word has been pronounced correctly      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your child/young person to watch you as you say the word</li> </ul>  |
| Unable to break unfamiliar words into sounds, so cannot read them                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blend the first two or three sounds at the start of a word into one sound, for example, /spl/, /a/, /t/ rather than /s/, /p/, /l/, /a/, /t/</li> <li>• Encourage your child to recognise - /sh/, /ch/, /th/, /wh/</li> </ul>   |
| May have difficulty remembering difficult subject words, such as 'photosynthesis' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go over new words in your child's/young person's notes or textbook and make sure he/she understands the meaning</li> <li>• Encourage using a notebook for each subject, (science, art, history, etc.)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Teacher Guidance  Science Root Words  Literacy Inclusion Toolkit</a></li> </ul> |
| May be unaware of how to break a word into syllables,                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break a word into syllables. Repeat the word back, for example, 'parliament', 'chocolate'</li> </ul>   |

for example, 'armchair',  
'doorstep'

- Write the word, marking the syllables, for example, au/to/mat/ic
- [EA Cognition & Learning - Literacy Newsletter Issue 9: Phonics](#)
- Assistive Technology Tools can help:
  - [Read&Write Quick Reference Guides | Texthelp](#)
  - [Read&Write for Windows: Support Tools for Students with Dyslexia](#)
- In poems, emphasise rhythm by reading the poem. Use a highlighter pen to highlight alliteration, for example, 'gravelly ground'
- Explore Root words such as, 'port' means to carry. Develop awareness of related words - transport, import, export, deport
- [Teacher Guidance: Days of the Week Etymology | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit](#)
- [Printable Resource: Days of the Week Activity | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit](#)
- [Teacher Guidance: Science Root Words | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit](#)