

FACTSHEET: Ideas for parents ... supporting phonic development

General tips

If you are supporting your child with their phonics, consider timing. Children will not want to engage with activities immediately after a long day at school doing similar things. Try to make any activities fun and short, at times when your child is receptive to learning.

Phonics reading books. Children will usually bring home from school graded reading books, which contain words with the letters and sounds they are learning in class. Check that these books are the right level for your child. If books are too easy, your child will lose interest quickly, if they are too difficult, your child will become frustrated.

Pause, then prompt. If your child is stuck on a word (and the word is one that they can decode or have already learned), try not to jump in straight away. Pause and give your child time to work out what the word could be. If they are still unable to get the word, try prompting them to look at the first letter and sound out each letter in the word. Still stuck? Try re-reading the beginning of the sentence for them to see if that helps. Then read the rest of the sentence to see if that gives a clue. If your child still cannot get the word, then provide it. If your child is stuck on most words in the book, reading will be frustrating and meaningless – choose an easier book instead.

Read for meaning. When your child is learning how to sound out words, it can be easy for both child and adult to focus on this rather than understanding. Ensure that your child understands the words they are reading and is following the story. It is especially important for young readers to view reading as having a meaningful purpose. Focussing on sounding out meaningless words is a sure-fire way to ensure a child loses interest and motivation!

Games and activities to support phonics

- **Use what is around you.** Point out letters and words in the environment – don't overdo this as it will become tedious for your child, but occasionally draw attention to printed letters. Point to large letters or simple words on signs and sound out each letter, blending them together to make the word (*s-t-o-p*, stop). You are modelling to your child how to sound out, blend and read!
- **Bingo!** Try playing bingo. This works best with three or more people. Make each player a bingo card with six letters on that the child has learned (e.g. *s, t, a, p, i, n*). Each player's card should contain slightly different letters. One person takes on the role of 'bingo caller'. They will need small cards or pieces of paper with all of the letters on. The bingo caller pulls one card out of a bag at a time and says the

letter sound. Players with that letter on their bingo card can cross it out. The winner is the first player to cross out all six letters and shout ‘bingo!’ Swap roles on the next game as your child will practise just as much from being bingo caller.

- **Snap!** Make two or three more sets of the bingo cards, shuffle and divide amongst the players. Take it in turns to lay down a card on the centre pile. When two the same are placed consecutively, the first player to ‘snap’ their hand over the pile keeps the cards. Turn this into a phonics game – instead of calling ‘snap’, the player has to shout out the letter sound.
- **Play pelmanism.** Use the same cards as for the bingo and snap games. Place these face down on the table. Players take it in turns to choose two and turn these over. As they turn these over they make the sound that each letter makes. If a player has chosen two the same, they keep this pair. If the two cards are different, they are returned face down to the table. The next player takes his or her turn. This also acts as a memory game as efficient players will learn to remember where the cards have been placed. The winner is the player with the most pairs at the end of the game.
- **Blending and segmenting.** You can also use the cards you have made for the previous activities to help your child to blend sounds together. Put some cards together to spell out a word (e.g. p-a-n). Can your child blend them together to read the word? Turn this into a spelling game – give a word (e.g. sat) and ask your child to spell it with the small cards. Make this easier by providing just the letters in the word at first. As children gain in confidence, give them more letters to choose from.
- **Play noughts and crosses.** Make a noughts and crosses grid and write a letter in each square. Play noughts and crosses in the usual way, with each player having to sound out the letter before they place their ‘nought’ or ‘cross’ in that square.
- **Play Connect 4.** Play this in the same way as noughts and crosses but on a larger grid of up to eight by eight squares. Take it in turns to sound out a letter and place your ‘nought’ or ‘cross’ on that square. The winner is the first to get four in a row – horizontally, vertically or diagonally.
- **Play stepping stones.** Write each letter your child has learned on an A4 or larger sheet of paper. Place these on the floor. Sound out a letter and your child has to step on the corresponding letter. Now sound out another – your child has to jump to that card. Make words out of the sounds you give (e.g. c-a-t). Once your child has jumped from letter to letter, ask them to blend the sounds together. Can they make the word that you were sounding out?