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Number 533



Keys to the Literacy Kingdom

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Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics sound very similar and are all important components of reading. In order to read, a child needs an understanding of phonics. To acquire phonics, he or she must develop phonemic awareness. To develop phonemic awareness, the child must first have phonological awareness. The foundation for literacy success is laid early in a child's life, long before he or she picks up a book.



Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is a group of skills. It is the first step in the journey toward reading development, and phonemic awareness and phonics are destinations along the way. Phonological awareness develops as a child learns to listen to, identify, and manipulate the sounds in spoken language. It ranges from early skills such as naming rhyming words in a song or story to phonemic awareness skills such as creating new words by adding, deleting, and changing sounds from another word (e.g., changing the M in the word "mat" to an H changes the word to "hat.")

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear individual sounds (phonemes) or sound units in spoken words. It is also understanding that syllables and words are composed of a sequence of phonemes. When a student can hear that the word "cat" consists of three phonemes or sounds, she is practicing phonemic awareness. Without establishing a strong base of phonological awareness, a child will struggle to develop phonemic awareness. Research shows that strong phonemic awareness skills are a strong predictor of reading success.

Phonics

Phonics, simply put, is understanding the relationship between a letter symbol and a phoneme, otherwise known as a letter sound. For example, when a student learns that the letter D has the sound /d/ or "d," she is learning phonics. Phonics involves the written form of language and is integral to both reading and writing. If the written form of language is a puzzle, then phonics is the final piece. However, without phonological awareness skills, particularly phonemic awareness, a child will struggle to make sense of phonics.

Indicators Your Child is Struggling with Phonological Awareness in Preschool

- Disinterested in rhyming stories
- Difficulty remembering nursery rhymes
- Alliteration and repetition of words goes unnoticed
- Unable to count out syllables in words

Indicators Your Child is Struggling with Phonological Awareness in Grade School

- Difficulty generating rhyming words during play activities
- Cannot group together words that sound the same (i.e., hat, mat, etc.)
- Unable to identify the first sound or final sound in a word

- Hard time combining sounds to make words
- Difficulty identifying and manipulating sounds within a word (i.e., change d to m in “dad”)
- Unable to blend a sequence of sounds into a word (i.e., the word “wish” consists of 3 sounds)

Practice These Early Phonological Awareness Skills at Home

- Nursery rhymes – listen for words that rhyme, repeat, or start with the same sound.
- Rhyming – find words that that sound alike in books, songs, and videos.
- Alliteration – think of or find objects that begin with the same sound. For example, find all of the objects in the room that start with the “b” sound.
- Syllable Clapping – clap out the syllables in words of preferred objects, toys, and activities.
- Segment Syllables – break down and say the syllables in words. Start with two-syllable, compound words first (e.g., “doghouse”) and work up to multisyllabic, non-compound words (e.g., watermelon).
- I Spy – embed phonological awareness practice in a familiar game (e.g., “I spy something that starts with an “s”).

Children are never too young to work on phonological awareness. Singing familiar songs like “Row Your Boat” or reading nursery rhymes at bedtime exposes children to rhyming, rhythm, and alliteration. Practicing skills like syllable clapping or playing “I Spy” are easy things to do during routines already in place such as riding to and from school, sitting down for dinner, or getting ready for bed. The more often children are exposed to language activities supporting phonological awareness, the more likely they are to obtain the keys to the literacy kingdom.

REFERENCES

“Phonological Awareness: What It Is and How It Works” accessed May 31, 2018 from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/reading-issues/phonological-awareness-what-it-is-and-how-it-works>

“Phonological and Phonemic Awareness” accessed May 31, 2018 from <http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/phonologicalphonemic>

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Word Families
[Item #FD-78](#)

Phonological Skill Strips
[Item #STRP-67](#)

Phonological Awareness Fun Park Game
[Item #GB-215](#)

Phonological Awareness Chipper Chat
[Item #CC-77](#)