

Phonics Guidance for Parents

Introduction

As you know, the ability to read and write well is a vital skill for all children, paving the way for an enjoyable and successful school experience.

In order to make a good start in reading and writing, children need to have an adult listen to them and talk to them with eye contact and no screen-distractions. Speaking and listening are the foundations for reading and writing. Even everyday activities such as preparing meals, tidying up, putting shopping away and getting ready to go out offer you the chance to talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Through these activities, children hear the way language is put together into sentences for a purpose.

Books are a rich source of new words for your child; words you would not use in everyday conversations appear in books. Children need to have a wide vocabulary to understand the meaning of books, so read aloud and share books as often as you can. They will enjoy it and it will be useful to them when they come across these words in their own reading later on.

Children develop understanding that spoken words are made up of different sounds (*phonemes*) and they learn to match these phonemes to letters (*graphemes*). Phonics is about children knowing how letters link to sounds (*graphemes* to *phonemes*), for example, **c** as in 'cat', **ll** as in 'fell', **ee** as in 'sheep'.

Phase 1

- Developing children's speaking and listening skills as a basis for sound discrimination.
- The more words a child knows and understands the better equipped they are to start a phonics programme.
- Sound discrimination games (sounds on a CD, noises in a bag, on a walk, to a story, onomatopoeia buzz, tick tock, boom, musical instruments, rhyming games and (alliteration) tongue twisters)

Ways you can support your children at home

Play **'What do we have in here?'** Put some toys or objects in a bag and pull one out at a time. Emphasise the first sound of the name of the toy or object by repeating it, for example, 'c c c c – car', 'b b b b – box', 'ch ch ch ch – chip'.

Say: 'A **t**all **t**in of **t**omatoes!' 'Tommy, the **t**icklish **t**eddy!' 'A lovely **l**ittle **l**emon!' This is called alliteration. Use names, for example, '**G**urpreet **g**ets the **g**iggles', '**M**ilo **m**akes **m**usic', '**N**aheema's **n**ose'.

Teach them '**Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers**'.

Learning how to 'sound-talk'

Separate the sounds (*phonemes*) all through the word and say them aloud, then merge them together into the whole word. The merging together is called *blending* and is a vital skill for reading. – **c-a-t = cat**

Children will also learn to do this the other way around – **cat = c-a-t**. The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its sounds (*phonemes*) in order, all through the word. This is called *segmenting* and is a vital skill for spelling.

This is all oral (*spoken*). Your child will not be expected to match the letter to the sound at this stage. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.

Ways you can support your children at home

Sound-talking

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (*sounds*) and practise 'sound talk'. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

'I spy a p-e-g – peg.'

'I spy a c-u-p – cup.'

'Where's your other s-o-ck – sock?'

'Simon says – put your hands on your h-ea-d.'

'Simon says – touch your ch-i-n.'

Phase 2

- Children are taught to recognise letter (grapheme) phoneme (sound) correspondence. (which letters make which sounds) s,a,t,p,i,n this order allows for early word building.
- The letter sounds (phonemes) are short sounds e.g ss, rr ,hh ,mm (careful not to include a **uh** sound at the end)
- As soon as they know the first few they are taught to blend and segment with them.
- Children will develop a variety of strategies when reading but it is vital that they use their phonic knowledge as their main strength.
- Using the preceding text and knowledge of the story along with the pictures is ok, however the decoding skills of blending allows children to progress from learning to read to reading to learn.
- Read a variety of books, non-fiction, phonic based, picture clues and books with repetition of text, all of which develop children's confidence and enjoyment of books.
- When children begin to write spontaneously, producing spellings such as *frend* for friend; their attempt is recognised and sensitively corrected so that incorrect spellings do not to become ingrained.
- Letter names are important to the Foundation Stage curriculum once children know the sounds of words. They are taught through alphabet songs and rhymes.



Ways you can support your children at home

Magnetic letters

Buy magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught – have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

Making little words together

Make little words together, for example, *it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick*. As you select the letters, say them aloud: 'a-m – am', 'm-e-t – met'.

Breaking words up

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: 'met – m-e-t'.

Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.

Spelling is harder than reading words – praise, don't criticise. Little whiteboards and pens, and magic boards, are a good way for children to try out spellings and practise their handwriting.

Your child might be trying to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

Phase 3

The purpose of this phase is to:

- teach more graphemes, most of which are made of two letters, for example, 'oa' as in **boat**
- practise blending and segmenting a wider set of CVC words, for example, **fizz**, **chip**, **sheep**, **light**
- learn all letter names and begin to form them correctly



Ways you can support your children at home

- Sing an alphabet song together.
- Play 'I spy', using letter names as well as sounds.
- Continue to play with magnetic letters, using some of the two grapheme (*letter*) combinations:
 - r-ai-n = rain** blending for reading **rain = r-ai-n** – segmenting for spelling
 - b-oa-t = boat** blending for reading **boat = b-oa-t** – segmenting for spelling
 - h-ur-t = hurt** blending for reading **hurt = h-ur-t** – segmenting for spelling
- Praise your child for trying out words.
- Set a timer. Call out one word at a time and get your child to spell it on a magic board or a small whiteboard, against the timer – remember, they can use magnetic letters.
- Play 'Pairs', turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky words: **the the, to to, no no, go go, I I**
- Don't worry if they get some wrong! These are hard to remember – they need plenty of practice.

Phonics teaching will continue into Key Stage 1 (Year 1 and Year 2)

As your child enters Key Stage 1 (Year 1) they will continue to take part in daily sessions on phonics.

They will learn that most sounds (*phonemes*) can be spelt in more than one way. For example, the **f** sound can be written as **f** as in *fan* or **ff** as in *puff* or **ph** as in *photo*.

This develops their knowledge of spelling choices. They will continue with this spelling work into Year 2 and beyond.

They will learn that most letters and combinations of letters (*graphemes*) can represent more than one sound. For example, the grapheme **ea** can be read as /ee/ as in *leaf* or /e/ as in *bread*.



Ways you can support your children at home: reading together

Teach lots of nursery rhymes – each one tells a different story and helps to develop the concept of rhyme.

Enjoy and share books together – buy or borrow books that will fire their imagination and interest. Read and reread those they love best.

Make time to read with your child throughout their time in school – PLEASE continue reading to your child, even when they are reading independently. This is very important – your child needs to practise their reading skills every day, and needs the support of an interested adult. Grandparents, older brothers or sisters can help, too.

Let them see you reading – grown-ups can share their magazines about their favourite sport or hobby.

Read with your child – ask your child to attempt unknown words, using their phonic skills and knowledge. Make sure they **blend** all through the word.

Talk about the meaning of the book, too – take time to talk about what is happening in the book, or things that they found really interesting in an information book. Discuss the characters and important events. Ask them their views. Provide toys, puppets and dressing-up clothes that will help them to act out stories.

Explain the meaning of words (*vocabulary*) that your child can read but may not understand, for example, *flapped*, *roared*.

Listen to story tapes.

Teach your child some action rhymes – ‘Heads, shoulders, knees and toes’, ‘Here we go round the mulberry bush’. Use tapes and CD-ROMs of nursery rhymes to sing along to.

Read simple rhyming books together – leave out a rhyming word now and then, and see if your child can work out the missing word. If not, you say it.

Borrow or buy the best books you can to share with your child. Libraries and bookshops can advise you of the most popular books.

Add sound effects when reading a story and encourage your child to join in.

A quiet area with some cushions and toys is a comfortable place where you and your child can go to look at a book together.



Ways you can support your children at home: writing together

Magic writing boards are great fun for children, both little and larger versions. It won't be long before they will be trying to write their names!

Write with your child – 'think aloud' so they can hear the decisions you are making as you write. Make sure the writing is for a purpose, for example, a birthday message, a shopping list, an address.

Talk about the words they see in everyday life – food packaging, signs in the supermarkets, captions on buses and lorries, messages on birthday cards and invitations.

Write a shopping list together.

Send an email to a family member or a friend – your child says the message, you write it!

Provide your child with a shoe box full of things to write with – writing tools of various sizes and thicknesses: gel pens, crayons, glitter pens, rainbow pencils, old birthday cards, coloured paper, sticky tape to make little books. Rolls of wallpaper can be attached to a table or wall to provide a large canvas for their writing and drawing.

Praise them for their play writing – those early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.



Ways you can support your children at home: what to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home

Relax!

Reading

- Make sure your child sees you reading.
- Read **to** your child. Show you like the book. Bring stories to life by using loud/soft/scary voices – let yourself go!
- Spread books around your house for your child to dip into.
- Let your child choose what **they** would like to read – books, comics, catalogues.

- Read favourite books over and over again. Enjoy!

Writing

- Make sure your child sees you writing.
- Compose an email together, inviting a friend over to tea.
- Continue to make words together, using magnetic letters.
- Leave a message on the fridge door and encourage them to write a reply to you.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. When the story is complete they can draw pictures to go with it.
- Buy stickers of a favourite film or TV programme and make a book about it.