

# Phonological (Sound) Awareness

## What is phonological (sound) awareness?



Phonological awareness (sometimes referred to as 'sound awareness') is the awareness of what sounds are and how they come together to make words. Skills include the ability to rhyme, segment words into syllables and single sounds, blend sounds together, identify sounds in different positions in words and manipulate sounds within words.

## Why is phonological (sound) awareness important?

Phonological awareness is an important pre-literacy skill because if there are difficulties in this area it can often lead to reading and writing difficulties. Children develop phonological awareness skills in a sequential pattern which is as follows:

- The ability to hear rhymes and alliteration.

- Hearing words in spoken language.
- Hearing syllables in spoken words and then being able to clap out syllables.
- Hearing sounds at the beginning of words and then being able to produce words that begin with certain sounds.
- Recognising and identify rhyming words and then being able to produce rhyming words.
- Being able to hear individual sounds in words.
- Being able to blend individual sounds together to make a word (e.g. c\_a\_t = cat).
- Being able to segment sounds in words (e.g. cat = c\_a\_t).
- Deleting, substituting and manipulating sounds in words.

## **What are the building blocks necessary to develop phonological (sound) awareness?**

- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Hearing:** Adequate hearing for the detection of speech sounds.
- **Middle ear functioning:** A child with on-going ear infections, glue ear or colds which block the ears may have fluctuating hearing levels which can affect speech and sound awareness.
- **Auditory Processing:** The ability to hear sounds, distinguish between similar sounds or words, and separate relevant speech from background noise.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Understanding simple concepts, such as beginning, end, middle, long, short, loud and soft.
- **Articulation:** Clarity of speech sounds and spoken language.
- **Working memory:** The ability to temporarily retain and manipulate information involved in language comprehension, reasoning, and learning new information; and to update this information as change occurs.

## How can I tell if my child has problems with phonological (sound) awareness?

Age	Common Phonological (Sound) Awareness Difficulties
<b>Overall</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has difficulty decoding unfamiliar words.</li> <li>• Has difficulty pronouncing words correctly.</li> <li>• Reads in a slow, laboured or dysfluent manner when reading age appropriate paragraphs or stories.</li> <li>• Has difficulty understanding what they are reading.</li> <li>• Has difficulty spelling and writing words.</li> <li>• Has difficulty learning and accessing the curriculum at school.</li> <li>• Lacks motivation to participate within reading and writing activities.</li> <li>• Presents with low self esteem related to academic difficulties.</li> </ul>
<b>4 - 5 rs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has difficulties recognising and pronouncing words that rhyme.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot hear the beginning sound in a word.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The child is unable to identify syllables in words (e.g. butter=bu....tter, caterpillar= ca...ter...pi...llar).</li> </ul>
<b>6 - 7 yrs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is unable to segment words into sounds (e.g. cat=c...a...t - 3 sounds).</li> <li>• Is unable to blend sounds together to make words (e.g. c_a_t = cat).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot hear the beginning, end or middle sounds in words.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Is having difficulty spelling simple non-words (e.g. lib, nuk, das).</li> </ul>

## What other problems can occur when a child has phonological (sound) awareness difficulties?

When a child has phonological (sound) awareness, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Literacy:** Spelling and writing.
- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehending language.
- **Expressive (using) language:** The use of language through speech, sign

or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.

- **Articulation:** Clarity of speech sounds and spoken language.
- **Completing academic work**
- **Handwriting**
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined end result.
- **Sensory processing:** Accurate registration, interpretation and response to sensory
  - stimulation in the environment and one's own body.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Self confidence:** A child's belief in their ability to perform a task .

## **What can be done to improve phonological (sound) awareness?**

- **Work collaboratively** with preschool/school staff to set up joint communication goals and develop strategies to help support the child within the classroom setting.
- **Sing nursery rhymes** to help expose the child to rhyming words.
- **Reading time:** Set aside a regular time to read to and with the child every day.
- **Family reading:** Set aside a regular time for the whole family to sit down and read together.
- **Reading materials:** Provide a range of reading material around the house to expose the child to sounds in words (e.g. letters, newspapers, magazines, comics, picture books). Place items in the lounge room, in the bedroom and even in the bathroom.
- **Visit the library:** This will encourage the child to enjoy reading and writing and they will be able to access a wide range of reading materials. Also, the library may offer reading programs like guest story tellers which may further increase the child's interest in reading like .
- **Electronic programs:** Enhance the child's skills by utilising other activities such as books on tape, using programs on the computer (e.g. Reading Doctor, Reading Eggs) or Ipad.
- **Speech Therapy assessment:** To identify where the sound awareness

breakdown is occurring and if there are other elements such as receptive language (understanding) or articulation difficulties that might be having an impact.

## What activities can help improve phonological (sound) awareness?

- **Listen to sounds** in the environment, songs, stories, words and speech sounds.
- **Look at books** together from an early age.
- **Make sounds:** Talk about how sounds are made with your mouth and practise making different sounds in front of the mirror (e.g. a snake makes a “sssss” sound).
- **Alphabet:** Look at alphabet books and sing alphabet songs.
- **Sing nursery rhymes** and songs: Emphasise rhythm and rhyme in rhymes and songs, such as ‘Incy Wincy Spider’ and ‘Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star’ (e.g. “Twinkle twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are”).
- **Read books together** which have an emphasis on sound play (e.g. rhyme, alliteration, or words that start with the same sound). Highlight to the child that the rhyming words sound the same because they have the same endings (e.g. ‘cat’ and ‘hat’ both have an ‘at’ sound in them).
- **Identify sounds in words.** For example, talk about the sound at the start of words – ‘Listen, mummy starts with the /m/ sound. Let’s find more words that start with the /m/ sound’).
- **‘I Spy’:** Play games like ‘I Spy’ and take turns to find objects that begin with a specific sound (e.g. ‘I spy with my little eye something beginning with /t/’).
- **Syllables:** Model and encourage the child to identify the number of syllables in a word by clapping, drumming or stamping their feet (e.g. ‘butterfly’- but - ter -fly). Clap out the name of the child as well as the names of siblings, pets, family members and classmates.
- **Feely bag:** The adult and child can take turns to pull out objects to focus on:
  - Rhyme: Put pairs of items into a feely bag. If the two objects rhyme they can keep the pair.
  - Syllables: Place a variety of objects (e.g. toys, plastic food) into

the bag. Get the child to take out an object, say the word and work out how many syllables it has.

- **Sound segmentation:** Select pairs of objects/pictures that have the same number of sounds in their name. Put them in a bag. Each child takes out two objects/pictures and says whether they have the same number of sounds. If they do, the child gets to keep the pair. Note: we are focusing on the number of sounds not the number of letters (i.e. b-oa-t has the same number of sounds as c-a-t). Initially you may want to use blocks to represent each sound.
- **Silly sentences:** Make up silly sentences where words begin with the same sound (e.g. “Katy the cute koala likes cuddling Chloe”).
- **Word pairs:** Think of a list of familiar pairs (e.g. fish and chips, knife and fork, Posh and Becks, salt and pepper). Try swapping the first sounds of each word to make spoonerisms (e.g. table and chair = chable and tair).
- **Sound Swap:** Take it in turns to change a sound in a word to create a new word (e.g. hat - hut- hum - hug - bug - bag).

## **Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with phonological (sound) awareness in my child?**

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with manipulation difficulties is important to:

- Develop the child’s ability to identify and produce rhyming words.
- Improve the child’s syllable awareness.
- Develop the child’s ability to blend sounds.
- Strengthen the child’s ability to identify sounds at the start, at the end and in the middle of words.
- Help the child sound out words.
- Improve the child’s reading comprehension.
- Help the child read fluently.
- Develop the child’s confidence and self esteem.
- Improve the child’s spelling.
- Some children who have phonological awareness difficulties require explicit teaching of these skills in order to develop their reading and spelling abilities (e.g. to use strategies when attempting unfamiliar

words).

## **If left untreated what can difficulties with phonological (sound) awareness lead to?**

When children have difficulties with phonological (sound) awareness they might also have difficulties with:

- Completing comprehension tasks (such as reading the maths question) that require reading of text.
- Completing and following through with tasks that require the ability to read and comprehend written instructions (e.g. traveling directions, recipes, assembling furniture, taking medication).
- Reading signs.
- Reading maps.
- A lack of enjoyment of literature.

## **What type of therapy is recommended for phonological (sound) awareness difficulties?**

If your child has difficulties with phonological awareness, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just phonological awareness) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child  
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

