

Developing Early Speech Sound Awareness Skills

What is speech sound awareness?

Speech sound awareness is also known as phonological awareness. It is the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds in words. It develops from the age of 2 years and is essential for the development speech sounds and reading.

There are lots of games that you can play with your child to help to develop their early sound awareness skills. Whilst playing these games, reduce back ground noise by turning off things like the TV, radio and phones. This will help your child to really tune into the sounds they are supposed to be listening for

Songs, rhythm and rhyme

- **Singing nursery and action rhymes** with your child is a fun and really important way of supporting their speech and language development. Try to sing the same songs on a daily basis so that your child gets to know the tune and words. Sing in the bath, in the car, walking down the road etc. It's also fun to accompany the song with a shaker/tambourine/drum or clapping. If you don't have these you can use a saucepan and wooden spoon or beads in a jar etc.
- **Dance, sway, clap, stamp your feet and skip** alongside the music. Encourage your child to join in with you. Music with a strong beat is best.
- When your child is familiar with a nursery rhyme, **miss out the end rhyming word or say the wrong word** (e.g. 'Humpty dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great' or 'Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great **ball**'). See if your child can fill in the missing word or correct the mistake.
- **Read short poems and picture books** that have a rhyming story. Read the same ones again and again so your child gets to know them and can start joining in the story with you.
- **Make up silly rhyming names** to match your child's name, or use a pair of puppets (e.g. Kim, Sim, Bim or Riley, Miley, Smiley). Encourage your child to make up rhyming strings. They do not need to make real words (e.g. sanana, banana, boggy, doggy etc.).

Listening games – using non speech sounds

- **Guess the instrument** – choose two sets of matching noisemakers/instruments. These could include shakers, bells, drums made of saucepans and wooden spoons. Let your child play with the instruments and listen to the sounds they make. Describe the sounds: are they loud or quiet? Hide one set of the instruments behind a screen (e.g. a box or a large book) and place a matching set in front of your child. Play one of the instruments behind the screen and see if your child can show you which one you played. Play two instruments one after the other. Can your child tell you if the instruments were the same or different? Gradually increase the number of instruments to choose from. See if your child can remember a sequence of two or three sounds.
- **Hunt the music box** – hide a music box or musical toy somewhere in the room while your child waits outside the room. When they come back in, ask them to listen and find the sounds.
- **Other game ideas** – play games that encourage good waiting, turn taking and listening. These could include the following:
 - Playing 'ready steady go' with wind up cars, marble runs or pop up toys.
 - Copying beats on a drum.
 - Matching sounds to pictures (e.g. animal noises). Sound lotto sets and apps are commercially available.
 - Playing musical statues, musical islands/chairs etc.
 - Listening to environmental sounds (e.g. washing machine, Hoover, and car). Can your child identify what the sound is?