

### Learning Sounds

Letter names are the actual names of the letters - eg what we use when we sing the alphabet song a b c d e f g. Phonics is the sounds that letters make in words eg /c/ /a/ /t/ when we stretch out the word.

Parents often believe that phonics is the key to learning to read and the reason for this is because it is the one thing that they themselves remember from their own experiences of learning to read.

Phonics is only one component of learning to read. All schools teach phonics and it actually takes about eighteen months to teach all of the sounds (there are 44 sounds or phonemes in the English language, not 26). Children can actually learn to read without any phonics but they need phonics to be a better reader.

A child's brain is not developed enough usually until between 4 1/2 and 6 years of age to hear the differences in sounds. Try saying /m/ in man and then /n/ nose, or /d/ in dad and /p/ in pig to see how difficult it is for children to hear the differences. Hearing the difference can be hampered by hearing loss, glue ear, ear infections or colds.

Phonemic awareness is the skill that comes before learning phonics and is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words.

#### Games that develop phonemic awareness

- Count the number of sounds heard in a word. eg sh/i/p has three
- Add a sound. eg what do I get if I add a /p/ to ink
- Take away a sound. eg what do I get if I take /b/ away from bend
- Rhyming words. eg what word rhymes with cat

It is very important for children to know the names of the letters. We use letter names for spelling and some sounds in words are actually letter names eg 'c' in the word see, 'a' in cake. Parents often believe that because their children can say the alphabet, that they know the letter names. Can they actually find a 't' on a page or write a 't' and match it to its partner 'T'? There is a strong relationship between the knowledge of letter names and whether a child is ready to learn to read and that is because of the child's awareness of literacy.

If a child is asking about sounds in words or isolating sounds in words then it is possible to teach them phonics before starting school but otherwise it is best to let the schools do their job. Instead play rhyming games, learn nursery rhymes, or read rhyming books to develop that phonemic awareness.

By Teach Your Tots