

Learning to Read and Write

Skills for reading and writing

- 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.



Ways you can support your children at home: talking and listening

- **Make time to listen to your child talking** – as you meet them from their setting or school, as you walk, or travel home by car, in the supermarket as you shop, at meal times, bath times, and bedtimes – any time!
- **Switch off the TV, radio and mobile phones** – and really listen!
- **Show that you are interested in what they are talking about** – look at your child, smile, nod your head, ask a question or make a response to show that you really have been listening.
- **Make a collection of different toy creatures** – for example, a duck, a snake, an alien, say the sound it might make as you play together, for example, ‘quack-quack’, ‘sssssss’, ‘yuk-yuk’, and encourage your child to copy you.
- **Listen at home** – switch off the TV and listen to the sounds, both inside and outside the home. Can your child tell you what sounds they heard, in the order in which they heard them?
- **Play-a-tune** – and follow me! Make or buy some simple shakers, drums and beaters, then play a simple tune and ask your child to copy. Have fun!
- **Use puppets** and toys to make up stories or retell known ones. Record your child telling the story and play it back to them.

As we begin to teach the children the skills that they will need in order to be successful readers and writers, we focus on speaking and listening activities.

We explore body sounds, sounds in the environment, the difference in the sounds of percussion instruments, rhythm and rhyme, voice sounds and alliteration - words that all begin with the same initial sound – ‘sad, Sammy snake’, ‘big, bad bug’.

All the way through we also teach the skills of ‘blending’ and segmenting’.

- Blending

We teach the children how to blend or merge sounds together to read each word, in the right order, to read a word. E.g. c-a-t = cat.

- Segmenting

We teach the children how to segment each word to spell. E.g. cat = c-a-t

The aim is for the children to read the whole word automatically.

These activities are all done orally. 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 or Robot-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.’

We teach the children the smallest unit of sound – called a ‘phoneme’.

This is the order in which the ‘phonemes’ are taught and practised. Correct pronunciation is vital!

c not kuh or cee b not buh or bee a not ay

Set 1 letters = s, a, t, p

Set 2 letters = i, n, m, d

Set 3 letters = g, o, c, k

Set 4 letters = ck, e, u, r

Set 5 letters = h, b, f,ff, l,ll, ss

Set 6 letters = j, v, w, x

Set 7 letters = y, z,zz, qu

A phoneme can be represented by more than one letter. E.g. ll as in bell ss as in hiss ck as in sock.



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.

Don’t forget the writing box!

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.

Getting ready for writing

We will model how to form letters (*graphemes*) correctly, so that children can eventually acquire a fluent and legible handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time. A child's ability to form a letter correctly is a separate skill from phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs considerable co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers.

In the early stages of phonics children can use letter cards or magnetic letters to demonstrate their knowledge of phonics.

Writing in lower-case letters

We shall be teaching lower-case letters, as well as capital letters. As most writing will be in lower-case letters it is useful if you can use these at home. A good start is for your child to write their name correctly, starting with a capital letter followed by lower-case letters.



Ways you can support your children at home

Using their whole body

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated through their whole body, not just their hands and fingers. Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls – also skipping on the spot, throwing a Frisbee, picking up pebbles from the beach and throwing them into the sea. Have fun!

Hand and finger play

Action rhymes such as '*Incy wincy spider*', '*One potato, two potato*' and '*Tommy Thumb*' are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with salt dough or clay really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cookery and using simple toolkits.

Hand–eye co-ordination

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place – these all help hand–eye co-ordination.

Pencil hold

The 'pincer' movement needs to be practised. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Provide them with kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects. Move on to challenging them to pick up smaller things, for example, little cubes, sugar lumps, dried peas, lentils, first with chopsticks, then with tweezers.

Ask children to peg objects to a washing line.

Provide plenty of different types of pen and pencil; hold their hand to practise the correct grip.

As the children progress they will be introduced to other phonemes.

They will also be taught the 'tricky' words – those that cannot be read or spelt using the sounds of the letters. E.g. to, no, the, go. This will be achieved through the use of flash cards and games.



Ways you can support your child at home

- 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 a game – hunt the word - hide words in sand or flour, set a timer, hold up the word that you want them to hunt for, and 'go'! Repeat the word and encourage them to say –'I am looking for the word 'the'.
- 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.

As the children make even more progress, they will be introduced to the remaining phonemes, and given time to practise and consolidate their new learning.

Obviously, the more children are exposed to activities involving letters and sounds, the quicker they will consolidate their newly acquired skills.

Your involvement in this new learning is vital, and we ask that whenever possible you take time to encourage them to use their new knowledge through the activities outlined above.

Thank you for showing your interest and if anything that has been discussed needs more clarification, then please do not hesitate to speak to us.

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Reception class teachers