



What is phonemic awareness and why is it important?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp, 1992)

There is research that states that "The best predictor of reading difficulty in kindergarten or first grade is the inability to segment words and syllables into constituent sound units (Lyon, 1995).

The role you play in the development of your child's phonemic awareness is very important. You can help by building up your child's vocabulary, exposing them to a variety of topics and experiences so that they can gain background knowledge.

The easiest activity that you can do with your child is to play with nonsense rhymes. Take an everyday word like 'milk' and make up nonsense rhymes with it. "bilk, silk, wilk,....etc." This takes only a few moments and can be done at home, in the car, while going for a walk or just before bedtime. This activity allows your child to orally manipulate sounds of the English language.

Reading books that rhyme are also an excellent way to develop phonemic awareness. You can read the story to your child and just leave out the rhyming word, and have them fill it in. Some good resources for developing phonemic awareness are Dr. Seuss books such as, "Green Eggs and Ham," and "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish." Mem Fox also has some excellent books, "Time For Bed" and "Whoever You Are." These books can be purchased, or better yet why not visit your local library.

A fun activity is to take your child on a scavenger hunt. You can hunt for things that begin with the same sound as the child's name, their favourite toys, or any other sound you want to play with. You can hunt, around the house, in the yard, at the park, at the store, in the car, or any place at all! Another good practice activity is for you to segment little words into sounds and have the child guess what the word is. For example segment the word cat into sound 'c/a/t/' and see if your child recognizes that these three sounds make up the word 'cat'.

Whatever you do, make it fun and relaxing!