

## Chapter 4

# Teaching Phonemic Awareness Easily

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**F**or the last several years, researchers and educators have stated that a child must have something called “phonemic awareness” in order to learn to read.

Simply defined, phonemic awareness is helping children become aware of speech sounds for future reading, spelling and writing. It is discovering and connecting letter sounds which form words by isolating the sounds, by syllabifying, and by building words and breaking them apart.

“Phonemic awareness, a precursor to phonics, is important to teach from the very beginning...there are high correlations found by others between preschooler’s phonological awareness and later reading skills.” (The Alphabetic Principal and Learning to Read, by Isabelle Y. Lieberman, Donald Shankweiler and Alvin M. Liberman.)



Teaching phonemic awareness might be such a natural occurrence that you don’t even know you are doing it. For example, just talking to a baby and repeating a baby’s speech sounds over and over again is phonemic awareness. When you hear your baby making those important first gurgling sounds, and say them back to your baby, your child is working on important speech sounds that will be used throughout her/his life.

As you show the world to your baby, you point to the object and state its name. “Puppy.” Again you repeat in a musical voice, “Puppy. That’s a puppy, p, p, puppy.”

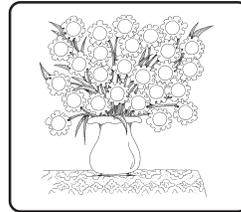
We have been teaching our children nursery rhymes for centuries, even though there hasn't been a child in 200 years who can totally understand them (or a parent who can explain them). We teach them because of their magic rhythm and rhyme.

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary,*

*How does your garden grow?*

*With silver bells and cockle-shells,*

*And pretty maids all of a row.*

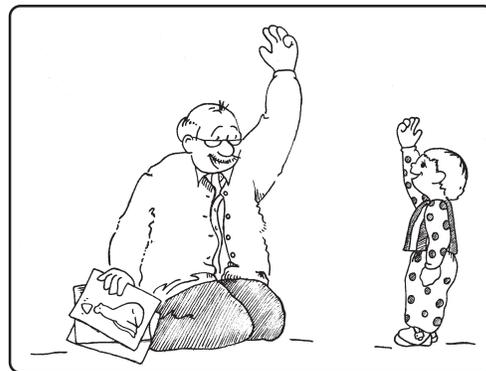


Marilyn Jager Adams states that “low-readiness pre-readers can hear the difference between phonemes as well a high-readiness pre-readers can. (Cronnell, B. A. 1970) The difference is that the low-readiness pre-readers are simply unprepared to think consciously about the sound structure of words in this way.”<sup>1</sup>

More simply said, struggling non-readers can HEAR the difference in the phonemes as well as any child. They just don't understand what they are hearing and can't use it for reading skill development.

The activities in this chapter will not only help you teach phonemic awareness to your baby, toddler, preschooler, kindergartner, or first grader, but it will help your child have a cognitive awareness of speech and letter sounds, so s/he can start school being a “high-readiness pre-reader.”

These activities have been designed to do anywhere: the home, car, restaurant, plane, the eternal wait in the doctor's office, etc. You will only spend 5 – 10 minutes on these, depending on the age and attention span of your child. Watch this carefully. If s/he understands the concept, can do it and is enjoying it, continue with the activity. With the first sign of difficulty or boredom, stop. Try something easier. Your child will eventually be ready. If s/he perceives the following activities to be a game, s/he will want to participate. *The secret is to keep it light and make it fun!*



<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Jager Adams, Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print

## Activities

(These activities are designed for all ages. Watch for “b” baby, “t” toddler, “p” pre-school, “k” kindergarten, “1st” first grader.)

### **Listen to your child talk**

If you have a baby, listen carefully as s/he gurgles and coos, and repeat the sounds back to her/him. Show a joyous face at the same time, and you’ll motivate the child to coo even more! (“b”).

For your toddler or older child, really listen to her/him talk. Using a favorite book, pictures of the family, a toy catalog, anything of interest to a child, is a great vehicle for conversation. Allowing her/him time to form her/his thoughts, and put them into conversation, is one of the BEST things you can do for your child. It is the gift of time and attention, first and foremost, not to mention preparation for academic skills in the future. (“t” – “1<sup>st</sup>”).



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- Sometimes the busy pace of the day precludes us from really listening and
- holding a conversation with our children. Hold your child, or sit closely,
- snuggled up. Look into her/his eyes. Really listen to her/him.

Using your child’s own words, repeat what s/he says. For example, if your child says, “That car is a big, blue car.” Say, “Yes! That car is a big, blue car.” Then, state a new thought about the car, or ask a question. This brings out more thoughts and more conversation. The child is also developing thinking skills as s/he is listening, thinking, and talking.

If your child is very young or has speech delays (don’t worry, by the way!), this is a great opportunity to gently supply the correct sounds and words. If the child says, “dat a big, boo car dere,” you can say, “That *is* a big, blue car there,” emphasizing proper sounds and sentence structure. If your child cannot “get the words out” gently supply them. Make sure you give ample time for her/him to try, however. Rushing in and supplying too much isn’t good either. Older siblings often try to speak for the child. Remind them to give your toddler, preschooler, kindergartner, etc., time to try.



Have these little conversations throughout the day. Make it enjoyable. This will help your child develop more advanced speech patterns as they listen to how you state words and form sentences.



**NOTE**

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 : Always be positive and appreciative. The purpose at this point is not to correct, :  
 : but to supply and “re-state,” to make your child *aware* of sounds within words :  
 : and words within sentences. :  
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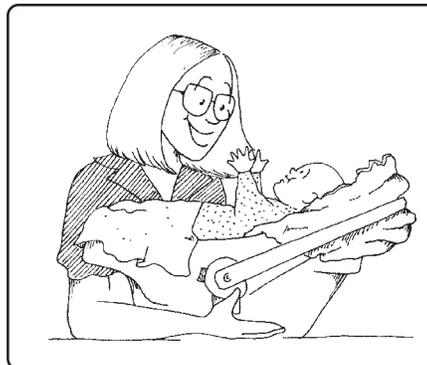
**Repeating words**

Call out familiar words, one at a time. Have your toddler repeat each word, “kitty,” “doggy.” (Two syllable words are easy for a child to hear and repeat. The rhythm of the multiple syllable is the reason.) Take her/his hands and clap out the syllables. After you see that they can do this easily, call out a phrase. For example, say “big doggy,” “fuzzy kitty,” “white puppy,” etc. Clap these out also. Again, keep it simple and familiar. Eventually, they can playfully repeat simple to more complex sentences. (“b” - “p”)

**Teach your child simple poems, nursery rhymes, and songs**

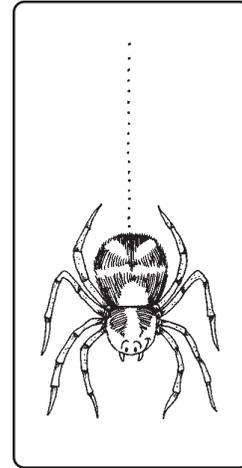
Children memorize these easily, especially if they have repeated sound patterns, rhythm, and hand gestures. There are many wonderful tapes and CD’s on the market for these purposes. Some of our favorites are:

- ↑ *Zoo-phonics CD-ROM*
- ↑ Games Games Games, Wee Sing\*
- ↑ Sing-Alongs, Wee Sing\*
- ↑ Wee Sing America\*
- ↑ Favorite Nursery Rhymes, Baby Genius\*\*
- ↑ Sleep, Baby, Sleep, Nicolette Larson\*\*



\* To order Wee Sing products, call 800.788.6262  
 \*\*These products can be ordered through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

As you are sharing simple nursery rhymes, poems, and songs, add gestures. Who has sung “Eensy, Weensy Spider” without hand gestures? It just isn’t done! What about “I’m a Little Teapot,” and “Pat-a-Cake”? Hand gestures are a **MUST!** *When the body moves, the brain remembers!* Plus, movement courses vital oxygen through the brain. All this action and movement make healthy children! (“t” – “1st”).

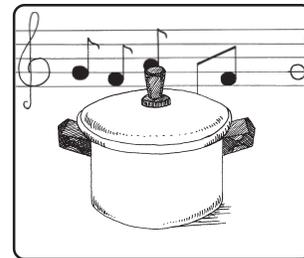


FYI: Parents, are you aware that schools all over the nation are reducing or deleting recesses and physical education from the school schedule? The rationale is because more time is being taken to teach reading, spelling and writing because of failing test scores. Our theory is that if all parents would take responsibility for beginning the literacy process in the home, we wouldn’t have to spend hours and hours teaching reading and spelling at school!

### ***Get out the pots and pans!***

Before considering teaching your child rhythm and rhymes in reading, s/he should be well versed in musical and physical rhythms. Get out the pots, pans, wooden spoons, rattles, drums, tambourines, xylophones, etc. Let her/him “bang away” to music. Put on the *Zoo-phonics® Music that Teaches* CD (or any other music – try various kinds). Have your child(ren) shake, beat, and move to the rhythm. (“t” – “k”).

*Variation:* After allowing her/him time to freely drum to the rhythm in music, start refining her/his rhythm. Give a pattern to copy. Show a simple beat, and have your child repeat it. Do this several times. Don’t switch the beat too early, or make it too hard too early. Change the beat occasionally so s/he can then do different rhythms. Keep it simple, so s/he is successful. Let her/him set the rhythm and you repeat it. Encourage creativity. Now, put on music that has a strong tempo. Let her/him find the beat.



You can make musical instruments from things you have at home:

- ↑ Take an oatmeal container and fill it with a cup of dry beans. With electrician’s or duct tape, tape the lid onto the container. Makes a great rattle. Try this with plastic margarine tubs, or 35mm film canisters. If you want a permanent lid on these containers, use a hot glue gun.

- ↑ String bells on a piece of elastic. Either sew or safety pin the bells to the elastic (add bows or curling ribbon streamers if you want it fancier). Then sew the elastic ends together to form a bracelet. Shake!
- ↑ Make a simple tambourine. Take two Chinette® paper plates. With a one-hole punch, punch holes evenly around the rim of the plate, about an inch apart. Now, thread yarn in and out, tying it tightly, or staple them together (or both). Before sealing it completely, toss in 1/2 cup of lentils or dried peas. Now seal. Using the same holes, tie bells onto the plate. Double tie the knots so they don't come loose. (Your child can decorate it with crayons before you connect the two plates together.) Shake it to the music!
- ↑ Make sand paper blocks. This is very simple. Take a 2" x 4" x 4" piece of wood. Make sure the wood is free from splinters. Now, glue and staple a large piece of sandpaper onto the block. For percussion, rub the two sandpaper blocks in opposite directions, making contact with each other. It makes a great "swooshing" sound.
- ↑ For a drum, use a tall oatmeal container. Tape the lid on tightly, and then cover the lid with either cloth or tape to make it stronger. Now hand the child a piece of doweling (1/2" x 1 foot).
- ↑ Make kazoo! Wrap a piece of waxed paper around a comb. Rubberband it so the waxed paper doesn't unfold. Now, hum against the waxed paper. It makes a vibrating sound. Have a family kazoo band hum-along!



Put on some music and use your instruments. Have everyone form a band.

### **Rock and Roll**

Hold your child in your lap. Put on music (no lyrics) in the background. Rock the child to the rhythm. Change the rhythms. After a while, allow your child (depending on age) to discover the rhythm by rocking you ("b" – "1st").

*Variations:*

- ↑ Link arms and move from side to side.

- ↑ Both of you sit with your legs in a V in front of you, and hold hands. Rock and roll back and forth and around.
- ↑ Dance with your child.
- ↑ Play music at the park or in the backyard while swinging. Find wonderful swinging music. It should be fairly slow.

**Clap Out Sounds**

(Make sure your child is ready for this task! However, you can always take your child’s hands and help her/him clap.)

Say the word, “cat” (for example). Show your child how many letter sounds are in the word. “c-a-t.” Always exaggerate or sustain the vowel sound in the middle of the word. Now clap out each sound that is represented in the word. Clap - “c,” Clap - “a,” Clap - “t.”



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When calling out words, keep them in the same family pattern (at, bat, cat, fat, etc.) for a while so they can hear the rhyming patterns. Don’t switch to other word families until your child has mastered this task. This will ready her/him for sound blending when the time comes!

Here is a list of words to use:

cab, bad, dad, fad, had, lad, mad, sad, bag, rag, sag, wag, am, bam, ham, jam, an, can, fan, man, pan, ran, cap, lap, map, nap, web, bed, fed, led, wed, beg, leg, tell, well, hen, men, pen, ten, bet, get, jet, let, met, net, pet, set, fib, bib, rib, did, hid, kid, lid, big, dig, pig, wig, him, rim, in, fin, pin, tin, win, dip, hip, lip, rip, sip, tip, it, bit, fit, hit, kit, pit, sit, fix, mix, six, job, rob, sob, nod, dog, fog, grog, hog, jog, log, hop, mop, cop, pop, top, cot, got, hot, lot, not, pot, tot, box, fox, ox, dub, rub, tub, mud, bug, dug, hug, jug, mug, rug, tug, gum, hum, rum, sum, fun, run, sun, up, cup, pup, us, bus, but, cut, hut, nut

**Clap Out Syllables**



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Sounds in the words are different than syllables. There might be more sounds than syllables. The word, “cat” has three sounds but only one syllable. Make sure your child is ready for this task!

Later, take words with which your child is familiar such as, “moth-er,” “fa-ther,” “broth-er,” “sis-ter,” “dog-gy,” “kit-ty,” etc. These all have two syllables and have a rhythm. Clap out the parts. When s/he is very good at this, toss in a one-syllable word, “cat,” “dog,” “dad,” etc. Show her/him that these have **one syllable** or **one clap**. Don’t worry about the word “syllable.” You can tell her/him about this word, or not. You know your child. You can just say the word “syllable” but only talk about sound parts in words.

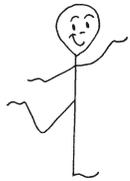


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P** : The secret is to show her/him how to “clap out words” many times. You can help her/him clap by holding her/his hands and clapping to the rhythm of the words. (“t” – “1st”).

*Here’s a more challenging list of words to use:*

bat, children, fat, large, man, present, order, play, street, pumpkins, spelling, reading, writing, work, mommy, daddy, aunt, uncle, cousin, brother, sister, me, paper, pencil, toast, jelly, milk, toaster, oven, car, grass, banana, apple, orange, grapes, puppy, K-Mart, Monday (etc.)

In time, you can begin to clap out larger words, like, “De-cem-ber” (three claps), “re-frig-er-a-tor” (five claps), January (four claps), Mc-Don-alds (three claps), etc.



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P** : This is a great activity to do in a restaurant (use the menu) or in the car as you are driving. Point out the store and road signs as you pass. Soon, they will recognize them and call them out before you do! (“t” – “1st”).

**Stretching Out Words**

Here’s another fun activity to do that only (at this point) involves the mouth and the ears. Say a word. Have your child tell you the sounds they hear in the word. For instance, if you say, “ d – o – g” (really stretch out those letter sounds), ask your child to tell you what the word is. Ask him or her to tell you all the sounds s/he hears in the word, in or out of order at first. The goal will be to state them back in order, but that will come in time.

As you say the word, clap out the sounds, “c-a- t.” Pat or tap the child’s arm, leg, or back, as you do this. Now ask her/him to close her/his eyes. Say the word again, and tap out the sound patterns. You can also pat her/his hands (patty-cake style) as you say the sounds.

After you teach her/him the sounds of the alphabet, s/he will even become more proficient at discerning the sounds. Continue the following activities as you teach the alphabet.

### ***Following Directions***

This is a fun activity, but it also trains the ears for good listening. And, it takes good listening skills to learn to read and spell. Start with one direction at a time. “Touch your nose.” “Touch your toes.” “Sit down.” “Stand up!” After your child has become proficient at this, start giving her/him two directions at a time, “Put your finger on your ear and turn around.” “Jump up and sit down!” In time, as s/he grows, add another direction until your child can remember and perform four tasks.

### ***Retell Stories***

Read a short and favorite story to your child. Now, ask your child to tell you the story. Be very patient as s/he searches for words and thoughts. Supply some of the story line occasionally, if and when the child needs it.

*Variation:* Ask your child to retell an event that just happened recently. For example, if you all have just gone to the seashore, ask your child to recall what you took with you, what you saw, did, heard, smelled, etc.

### ***Questions and Answers***

As you read a story aloud, stop and ask a question. Keep it simple at first, until your child is ready for more complex questions. The first question should be, “What did Goldilocks do with the porridge?” Later, as the child grows and matures, you can ask, “If you were the baby bear, how would you feel if someone ate your porridge?”

