

A “Sound” Foundation for Literacy

School is back in, so with that in mind, here are some tips to help prepare children for learning to read and write. The ability to “play with” and manipulate the sounds of speech is one of the important foundation skills for developing literacy. This includes such skills as:

Understanding and producing rhymes:

- Recognizing patterns and similarities in the sounds of words is a building block for recognizing these patterns in print. You can help develop this skill by:
- Reading and singing rhyming books, nursery rhymes, songs and chants that rhyme are lots of fun. Emphasize the rhyming words yourself, comment on how they sound alike, or pause before the rhyming words and let your child fill them in. Once your child has a good understanding of the concept of rhymes, you can have even more fun making up your own!
- Play rhyming games – see how many words you can come up with that end with the same sound. Have fun changing the first letter of a word; being silly and making up nonsense words is a great way to develop this skill! For example: dish, fish, wish, kish, tish!

Breaking words apart into their syllables or sounds:

- To recognize similarities in sounds, children need to be able to pay attention to individual sounds and words. You can help by:
- “Stretching” words, emphasizing each syllable (eg. po...ta...to) or sound (eg. ffff...i...shhhh).
- Emphasizing the sound at the beginning of a word, eg. “shhhhoe.” (Try repeating sounds that aren’t easy to prolong, such as “b – b – b – bike.”) It helps to relate each sound to an animal or action, eg. “the snake sound” for ssss, “the quiet sound” for shhh, “the yummy sound” for mmmm.
- Collecting pictures or objects whose words all start with the same sound (eg. bees, beans, bike, bubbles etc.) Cut pictures out of magazines, flyers, catalogues etc. and paste them into a special book, photo album or make a poster focusing on one sound. An easy way to make a book is to fold several pieces of blank paper in half, put fold a cardboard or construction paper cover around them and staple them together. Or glue the pictures on recipe cards, punch holes in the corners and put them all on a ring. Include your child in selecting the words and making the book or poster, and have fun looking at and talking about the pictures and sounds! Alphabet books are also great sources of words that start with the same sound.
- Shuffle together pictures of words and sort them by their first sound. Start with

sounds that are easy to distinguish, eg. “sh” and “b.”

Recognizing that printed letters and words have meaning:

- Kids need to associate the words and sounds that they hear in conversation, with “those black marks on paper.” You can help by:
- Running your finger under the words when reading to your child.
- Including them in making lists, writing notes and letters, etc. Include printing in pretend play activities, eg. play “restaurant” and make up a menu with pictures of the foods and the words in print beside them.
- Look at vocabulary books that have clear pictures of familiar objects, with the word printed under them. Point out the words to your child. Have your child tell you what a picture is, then point to the word and ask him/her to name it. (Demonstrate first if your child has trouble with this.) Make a big deal that your child is “reading!” Also, if you’re making sound books or posters, print the words under or over each picture. Point out the beginning letter as you say its sound (eg. All these words start with letter B. B says “b,” “b – ike”, “b – all” etc.)
- Help your child learn to recognize his/her name in print; help him/her learn to print it too!
- Play with alphabet magnets, blocks or puzzles. Spell words that your child knows and sound them out. Make up silly words.

Most of all, have fun! Take the lead from your child – if your child’s having trouble or isn’t interested at the moment, put the activity aside and try it again later. If you want more suggestions or help, feel free to call us at NONA!

***Note:** These suggestions are intended for children ages 4 and up, with good language skills. If your child has difficulty pronouncing words but otherwise has good language skills, these activities can really help them sort out the sound system of language. They’re likely to have more trouble with these skills as well, so give them extra time.*