Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness helps children to recognise words that are part of their home language, to hear the difference between words, and to correct their own speech sounds errors.

Children who have delayed or disordered speech sounds development often have poor phonological awareness. This means they find the following things difficult:

* Knowing when one word ends and another begins
* Splitting words into syllables
* Naming the first and last sounds in a word
* Hearing the difference between similar sounding words
* Changing sounds to make new words.

**Speech sounds Difficulties**

In UK schools, children focus on single sound awareness in ‘Phonics’ teaching. For some children, these activities will be difficult because they are still developing awareness of syllables.

Children who have a speech sounds *disorder* often have poor phonological awareness. Children who have a speech sounds *delay* often have phonological awareness skills at the same level as younger children.

* Research shows that if children do not have **good syllable awareness**, they will not be able to progress with single sound activities and progress with their speech sounds development.

**Vocabulary Learning**

Syllable awareness is tightly linked to vocabulary (learning and remembering new words). Phonological awareness helps us to:

* Identify words in phrases and sentences
* Decide if words are new or already known to us
* Memorise and remember new words
* Correctly say new words
* Children with fewer than 50 words need to develop their phonological awareness skills to be able to **recognise** and **learn** new words.
* When children with *language disorder* have support for their phonological awareness, they find it easier to learn new words. They will need extra support to apply this knowledge to reading and spelling tasks (literacy).

**Syllable Awareness**

Syllables are the ‘chunks’ of sounds that you hear in each word.

Daily, short activities are more helpful than long, tiring sessions. Try **5 – 10 minutes a day**. Help from the parent/carer with support from teachers will mean that your child can make progress more quickly.

**Compound Words**

An easy way to begin splitting words down into smaller chunks is to begin with ‘compound words’- words which are made when two words are put together. For example:

**Greenhouse Sunshine Cowboy Playground**

**Ice-cream Blackbird Toothbrush Popcorn**

You can then move on to non-compound words. A simple way of explaining the number of syllables in a word is to think of the rhythm of the word, and count the ‘beats’ within it. So for example **SISTER** has **2 syllables** (or beats, claps or taps) **SIS** – **TER,** as does **RA** – **BIT**.



**CA-TER-PI-LLAR** has **4** beats!

**1 syllable** **2 syllable** **3 syllable** **4 syllable**

hat baby butterfly caterpillar

house rabbit dinosaur cauliflower

cat hedgehog envelope helicopter

sock kettle spaghetti television

shoe crayon ladybird radiator

cake sandwich banana certificate

car table elephant alligator

fish spider computer binoculars

pen sausage strawberry decoration

sun window telephone thermometer

tree apple medicine calculator

**Activity 1: Clap the Beat**

Clap your hands for each chunk, tap a tambourine, bang a drum or stamp the ground! Just say the word and for each syllable, clap the beat out. Children with motor difficulties may find it easiest to tap the table, rather than clapping their hands.

**Activity 2: Jumping Jacks**

Use the list of 1, 2, 3, and 4 syllable words. Sit on the floor with the cards face down between you both. Tell your child that when a word with 2 syllables/beats is turned over, you have to jump up! Create new actions for 3 and 4 syllable words. Read each word slowly and allow time for them to ‘count the beats’ in their head.

If they are struggling, begin with you saying and clapping the word with them. Then move on to asking the child only to say the word whilst you both clap. Finally, let the child do the talking and the clapping!

**Activity 3: Hunt the Picture**



Hide some pictures around the room for your child to find. Once they find one they have to bring it back to you and clap or beat the number of syllables out (an instrument like a tambourine is good for this activity or a pan/drum). You could even have the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 in different corners of the room. Once they find a picture and clap its syllables, they run to put it into the right group!

**Step-up: Syllable Deletion**

Support your child to ‘chop off’ a chunk of the word. First use the **compound words** above (e.g. sunshine, postbox). Then move on to deleting the **first** chunk off the word. For example, you would say to your child:

* “Say ‘blackbird’. Now say it again, but don’t say ‘black’… (child says) “Bird!”
* “Say ‘rabbit’. Now say it again, but don’t say ‘ra’… (child says) “Bit!”

Then move on to chopping off the ‘**end**’ chunk of the word, for example:

* “Say ‘football’, without saying ‘ball’… (child says) “Foot!”
* “Say ‘donkey’, without saying ‘key’… (child says) “Don!”