

# Phonics AT HOME

**Gill Coulson** and **Lynn Cousins** suggest simple ways you can help parents to support their children's developing awareness of letters and their sounds...

**W**e all recognise the importance of building a strong and positive relationship with our children's parents and families. This now extends to helping parents understand the place and purpose of teaching phonics as a starting point for teaching reading. You may need to consider ways to provide them with the information that will help them understand and support their child's developing phonic awareness.

## First contact

You could choose to include a paragraph about phonics in your brochure or on your website. When you write about reading, remind parents that reading involves two skills, word recognition and comprehension. Then explain that children need to develop phonics skills to help them master word recognition, and that this starts in the early years with a focus on sounds.

Areas you might cover in such a statement are:

### ■ A reference to the requirements of the EYFS:


*If children are to achieve their ELGs in Communication and Language and Literacy they need lots of opportunities to become aware of sounds and to recognise differences in sounds.*

### ■ A reference to Letters and Sounds:

*If children are to understand that we use sounds to build the words we speak, write and read, they first of all have to be aware that sounds exist, and that there are lots of different sounds and how they can make them. Phase One of Letters and Sounds is designed to help children develop their skills through high quality speaking and listening.*

### ■ A description of your approach:

Identify, or list, the programmes you use, mentioning Phase One of Letters and Sounds, and any additional resources. Explain how you, for example, combine practical, phonic activities within the children's play to make sure that they are fun as well as promoting speaking and listening.

A young child with dark hair, wearing an orange t-shirt with a palm tree graphic and blue jeans, is sitting on the floor. The child is holding an open book. The left page of the book shows the word 'Dog' in red letters above a photograph of a dog. The right page shows large red letters 'p' and 'd'. The child's feet, wearing black shoes with orange soles, are visible in the foreground.

Parents need to be just as **encouraging** of their child's **efforts** in developing **sound** discrimination as they were when their child learnt to **walk** and **talk**

**Don't forget to include assessment procedures:**

Describe how their child's key person will be assessing the child's knowledge, skills and understanding during these activities so that they can judge when the child is ready to start more formal learning of letters, their sounds and how we use them in reading and spelling.

**Reporting to parents**

In line with the *Assessment and Reporting Arrangements (ARA)* you will be keeping parents informed about their child's progress on a regular basis. Use this opportunity to talk to them about their children's awareness of sounds.

At these early stages your phonic awareness assessments should be focused on the seven aspects in Phase One, using the three developmental strands. Explain to the parents that you are assessing their child's progress, and that for each aspect of Phase One you are noting whether their child can:

- identify different sounds as they hear them;
- remember sounds that they have heard;
- talk about sounds out of context.

Talk to parents about how Phase One is ongoing, but as you notice their child's growing proficiency with sound awareness you will judge when they are ready to start a formal programme to cover letter recognition.

**Supporting understanding**

You might decide to set up a workshop demonstrating the type of work the children do in your setting to develop their phonic awareness. You might produce a handout with the information covered in the workshop or include a section or leaflet in your welcome pack. Here, we suggest some areas that you should try to cover:

*Parents need to understand that their child's achievements in reading and writing start with an ability to speak, listen and understand.*

**Parents can help their child:**

- to talk, by giving their full attention to their child;
- to listen, by listening carefully to their child;
- to understand, by answering their child's questions.

*Parents need to recognise that their child needs to develop an enthusiasm for books and reading.*

**Parents can help their child:**

- by sharing books with them as often as possible;
- by showing their child that they read books, newspapers, screens, phones, messages, notes, magazines, etc.

*Parents need to know some details about the phonics programme and understand its purpose.*

**Briefly describe the seven aspects of Phase One as set out in Letters and Sounds. Explain that the skills developed in Phase One are:**

- crucial to their child's later success in reading and writing;
- made up of seven aspects of sound discrimination;
- focused on spoken language - nothing is written down during this phase;
- ongoing. They continue to develop throughout their education.

**Parents at home**

To the right are a few suggestions for simple activities parents can do with their children to encourage phonic awareness. We suggest that it's more helpful to give them to parents in bite-sized chunks, rather than all at once. One activity could be posted on your website each week or included in a regular newsletter. The ideas can easily be adapted to suit your theme and reflect parents' circumstances. They work just as well if families whose home language is not English use their own language.

Remind the parents that their child is in the early stages of learning and that these activities need to be light-hearted and fun. Parents and carers need to be just as encouraging and full of praise for their child's efforts in developing sound discrimination as they were when their child learnt to walk and talk.

We have given one idea for each of the first six aspects of Phase One and do not recommend including oral blending and segmenting in these activities for developing phonic awareness at home. We think this aspect is best done in your setting when a practitioner can recognise that an individual child is ready to do this.

**To help your child focus on sounds around them:**

When you're out and about encourage them to notice sounds, e.g. *cars, birds, pelican crossing, footsteps on different surfaces*. Start by noticing and identifying them, then talk about them later, perhaps remembering in order or comparing three different ones.

**To help your child tune into instrumental sounds:**

Encourage them to sing along with you to theme tunes on television and jingles on the radio. Find items around the home to play a tune, e.g. *spoon and pan, fingertips tapping on a table or shaking the baby's rattle*. If you tap 1, 2, 3 can your child copy the pattern?

**To help your child to respond to sounds using their own body:**

Encourage your child to stamp their feet or clap their hands as they sing. Sing a familiar action song together, e.g. *Wheels on the bus*. Try singing it slowly, then sing it quicker and quicker. Have fun trying to fit in all the actions as you sing!

**To help your child hear the rhymes and rhythm of spoken language:**

Choose a rhyming story book from the library. The librarian will be happy to suggest one. Enjoy reading it together over and over, encouraging your child to join in. Don't forget traditional nursery rhymes too - how many does your child know?

**To help your child identify initial sounds:**

Make dinner time fun by describing the food with a word beginning with the same sound, e.g. *posh potato, silly sausage, fat fish, popping peas, yummy yoghurt*. Be as silly as you like! How about *bubbly bread* or *muddy milk*? Don't worry if they don't get the idea at first, they will still benefit from the laughter you share!

**To help your child realise the variety of sounds that can be made with the voice:**

Take your child to a group of trees in the park. Run around the trees together making different noises each time your run, e.g. make sounds like an aeroplane, *Wheel!* Make sounds like a car, *Brrrr!* Make sounds like a bee, *Buzzzz!* Later, when you're getting them ready for bed, let's all whisper... Ah... Peace at last!

**abouttheauthors**



**Gill Coulson and Lynn Cousins** are experienced teachers of early years and Key Stage 1, and the authors of *Games, Ideas and Activities for Early Years Phonics*, part of

**Pearson Education's Classroom Gems series - the second edition of which is now available, including an additional section on Phase Two of Letters and Sounds.**

