



Growing readers!

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Tips for Teaching Your Child About Phonemes

As the parent of a young child, you probably have a sense that you should help your child learn the letters of the alphabet. As the foundation for all written words, letters are important because they are the symbols for the small actions your mouth makes as you say words. What's equally important, however, is that your child learns the sound associated with each letter. These individual sounds are called phonemes, and children who know about the connection between a letter and its phoneme have an easier time learning to read.

Tip #1: Focus on one sound at a time

Certain sounds, such as /s/, /m/, /f/ are great sounds to start with. The sound is distinct, and can be exaggerated easily. "Please pass the mmmmmmmilk." "Look! There's a ssssssssnake!" "You have fffffff markers on the table." It's also easy to describe how to make the sound with your mouth. "Close your mouth and lips to make the sound. Now put your hand on your throat. Do you feel the vibration?" Once your child learns a few phonemes, it will be easier to keep talking about letters and sounds.

Tip #2: Make the learning memorable!

Have fun with the letters and sounds. Gestures, such as a "munching mouth" made with your hand can make the /m/ sound much more fun! "Slithering snakes" made with an arm or hand can make the /s/ sound easy to remember. Tongue tickers, also called alliterative words, in which the sound you're focusing on is repeated over and over again, can be a fun way to provide practice with a sound. Try these!

- For M: Miss Mouse makes marvelous meatballs!
- For S: Silly Sally sings songs about snakes and snails.
- For F: Freddy finds fireflies with a flashlight

Tip #3: Help your child listen for the sounds

One part of learning letters and sounds is being able to figure out if a word contains a particular sound. "Do we hear /mmmmmm/ in the word mmmmmmoon? Do we hear /mmmmmm/ in the word *cake*?" These sorts of activities, done orally with your child, can help him begin to listen for and hear sounds within words.

Tip #4: Apply letter-sound skills to reading

Putting these skills to work within a book is a powerful way to help your child see the connection between letters, sounds, and words. As you're reading together, find places in the book to point out the letters and sounds you've been working on together. "Look! This page says 'Red fish, blue fish.'" There's the /ffffff/ sound we've been having fun with! It's at the beginning of the word fish."

This Growing Readers tip sheet was based on an article written for teachers. To read the full article: Murray, B. (2012). Tell me about Fred's fat foot again: Four tips for successful PA lessons. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(2), 139-144. And visit Dr. Murray's website, The Reading Genie, at <http://www.auburn.edu/rdggenie>.