



The John Moore Primary School



How can I help my child with Phonics?

What is phonics?

Phonics is a way of teaching children to read quickly and skilfully. They are taught how to: recognise the sounds that each individual letter makes; identify the sounds that different combinations of letters make - such as 'sh' or 'oo'; and blend these sounds together from left to right to make a word.

Children can then use this knowledge to 'de-code' new words that they hear or see. This is the first important step in learning to read.

Why phonics?

Research shows that when phonics is taught in a structured way - starting with the easiest sounds and progressing through to the most complex – it is the most effective way of teaching young children to read. It is particularly helpful for children aged 5–7.

Almost all children who receive good teaching of phonics will learn the skills they need to tackle new words. They can then go on to read any kind of text fluently and confidently, and to read for enjoyment.

Children who have been taught phonics also tend to read more accurately than those taught using other methods, such as 'look and say'. This includes children who find learning to read difficult, for example those who have dyslexia.

If you would like to find out more about phonics, visit www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/pedagogy/phonics or search for 'phonics' on the Department for Education website at www.education.gov.uk.

Helping your child with phonics

Phonics works best when children are given plenty of encouragement and learn to enjoy reading and books. Parents play a very important part in helping with this.

Some simple steps to help your child learn to read through phonics:

- Ask your child's class teacher about the school's approach to phonics and how you can reinforce this at home. For example, the teacher will be able to tell you which letters and sounds the class is covering in lessons each week.

- You can then highlight these sounds when you read with your child. Teaching how sounds match with letters is likely to start with individual letters such as 's', 'a' and 't' and then will move on to two-letter sounds such as 'ee', 'ch' and 'ck'.
- With all books, encourage your child to 'sound out' unfamiliar words and then blend the sounds together from left to right rather than looking at the pictures to guess. Once your child has read an unfamiliar word you can talk about what it means and help him or her to follow the story.
- Your child's teacher will also be able to suggest books with the right level of phonics for your child. These books are often called 'decodable readers' because the story is written with words made up of the letters your child has learnt. Your child will be able to work out new words from their letters and sounds, rather than just guessing.
- Try to make time to read with your child every day. Grandparents and older brothers or sisters can help, too. Encourage your child to blend the sounds all the way through a word.
- Word games like 'I-spy' can also be an enjoyable way of teaching children about sounds and letters. You can also encourage your child to read words from your shopping list or road signs to practise phonics.

Ways you can support your children at home: reading together

Teach lots of nursery rhymes – each one tells a different story.

Enjoy and share books together – buy or borrow books that will fire their imagination and interest. Read and reread those they love best.

Make time to read with your child throughout their time in school – PLEASE continue reading to your child, even when they are reading independently. This is very important – your child needs to practise their reading skills every day, and needs the support of an interested adult. Grandparents, older brothers or sisters can help, too.

Let them see you reading – grown-ups can share their magazines about their favourite sport or hobby.

Read with your child – ask your child to attempt unknown words, using their phonic skills and knowledge. Make sure they **blend** all through the word.

Talk about the meaning of the book, too – take time to talk about what is happening in the book, or things that they found really interesting in an information book. Discuss the characters and important events. Ask them their views. Provide toys, puppets and dressing-up clothes that will help them to act out stories. Explain the meaning of words (*vocabulary*) that your child can read but may not understand, for example, *flapped*, *roared*.

Listen to story tapes.

Teach your child some action rhymes – 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', 'Here we go round the mulberry bush', 'We all clap hands together'. Use tapes and CD-ROMs of nursery rhymes to sing along to.

Read simple rhyming books together – leave out a rhyming word now and then, and see if your child can work out the missing word. If not, you say it.

Borrow or buy the best books you can to share with your child. Libraries and bookshops can advise you of the most popular books.

Add sound effects when reading a story and encourage your child to join in.

A quiet area with some cushions and toys is a comfortable place where you and your child can go to look at a book together.

Ways you can support your children at home: writing together

Magic writing boards are great fun for children, both little and larger versions. It won't be long before they will be trying to write their names!

Write with your child – 'think aloud' so they can hear the decisions you are making as you write. Make sure the writing is for a purpose, for example, a birthday message, a shopping list, an address.

Talk about the words they see in everyday life – food packaging, signs in the supermarkets, captions on buses and lorries, messages on birthday cards and invitations.

Write a shopping list together.

Send an email to a family member or a friend – your child says the message, you write it!

Provide your child with a shoe box full of things to write with – writing tools of various sizes and thicknesses: gel pens, crayons, glitter pens, rainbow pencils, old birthday cards, coloured paper, sticky tape to make little books. Rolls of wallpaper can be attached to a table or wall to provide a large canvas for their writing and drawing.

Praise them for their play writing – those early squiggles and marks show that your child is beginning to understand writing.

Ways you can support your children at home: what to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home

Relax!

Reading

- Make sure your child sees you reading.
- Read **to** your child. Show you like the book. Bring stories to life by using loud/soft/scary voices – let yourself go!
- Spread books around your house for your child to dip into.
- Let your child choose what **they** would like to read – books, comics, catalogues.
- Read favourite books over and over again. Enjoy!

Writing

- Make sure your child sees you writing.
- Compose an email together, inviting a friend over to tea.
- Continue to make words together, using magnetic letters.
- Leave a message on the fridge door and encourage them to write a reply to you.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. When the story is complete they can draw pictures to go with it.
- Buy stickers of a favourite film or TV programme and make a book about it.

Useful websites and leaflets for more information

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/foragegroup/3to5years/readandwritetogether

This link to the Parents Centre website gives some really good ideas about how you can enjoy sharing books with your child and tells you a bit more about phonics.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/foragegroup/5to7years/alittlereadinggoesalongway

This link gives ideas about how to help your child as they are learning to read.

www.read-count.org/index.asp

A website for you and your child to explore together – it will give you some ideas about reading with your child and has online games for young children to play, both with you and on their own. It also has ideas for games to play away from the computer.

www.bookstart.co.uk

This website provides information about the national Bookstart scheme and the Bookstart packs that your child will receive as a baby, a toddler and at age three to four. It also gives information about sharing books with your child. You can find out about Bookstart events in your area, which you can attend with your child.

You can get 'Learning Together' leaflets – 'The road to reading' and 'Making their mark – children's early writing' (and other leaflets covering a range of topics) from Early Education, 136 Cavell Street, London, E1 2JA, telephone 020 7539 5400. You can also download them from the website www.early-education.org.uk.

www.nationalliteracytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parents

The Family Reading Campaign website provides a wealth of information to support you and your family. The Family Reading Campaign works to encourage reading in the home. It also offers many links to further websites.