

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

The most common cause of reading difficulties in early reading (grades 1 – 3) is the difficulties some children experience in the understanding and use of the phonological features of language. This means that children who are weak in this area are unable to identify or manipulate the individual sounds (phonemes) in words. Children without phonological awareness do not understand what it means for words to rhyme (cat/mat). They do not understand that words are made up of sounds which can be separated from each other and put back together again to form words (/m/ /a/ /t/ = mat). They do not realize that there may be other words within a word (in *yesterday* you can find *yes* and *day*) or that words are made up of syllables or word parts (yes/ter/day).

Skillful readers are able to recognize phonemes and put them together to build words and phrases. They do this quickly, accurately and automatically. Children who are struggling to learn to read must have explicit and direct teaching in phonological awareness. The development of these beginning reading skills are critical, and all children *must master them* in order to understand what they read.

Letters and letter clusters represent the sounds of spoken language. Children's knowledge of letters is a strong predictor of their success in learning to read. If, at preschool level, they are able to quickly and accurately identify, say and write the letters of the alphabet, they have an advantage in learning to read when they start school. Most children, and LD children in particular, benefit from explicit and direct teaching that centers on sounds, letters, and the relations between sounds and letters. There should be many informal opportunities for children to see, play with and compare letter names, shapes and sounds – both upper case and lower case versions of each letter. Activities should be varied and can include:

- matching the correct letters to the pictures (see Alphabet Cards)
- singing the *Alphabet Song*, reciting rhymes, playing with alphabet blocks, or plastic or magnetic letters, reading alphabet books, colouring-in letters,

making letters out of Play Dough or Salt Dough, making Alphabet Biscuits (see Recipes);

- playing games like “I spy with my little eye, something beginning with *b*”;
- playing rhyming games like “Find something in the room that rhymes (sounds like) *man*”;
- activities that encourage children to practice writing the letters they are learning, for example, their name.