



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

What is Phonological Awareness and Why is it Important for Children who are Learning to Read?

Phonological awareness is the explicit understanding of a word's sound structure. It is critical for effective decoding of printed words and the recognition of sound-letter connections necessary for competent spelling. The term began appearing in the research literature in the last 1970's, but there was an explosion of studies in the 1990's demonstrating the link between phonological awareness and reading development. Reading instruction programs that incorporate phonological awareness training are now widely used in speech-language pathology and special education, and are considered critical in preventing reading failure.

Phonological awareness is a multi-level skill that reflects knowledge of how words can be broken into smaller units in differing ways. Training tasks may require children to segment words into syllables, (syllable-level tasks), identify or produce rhyming words (rhyme level tasks), identify individual sounds in words, blend sounds to make words, or segment words into their individual sounds (phonemic-level tasks).

Dr. Gail Gillon wrote, "Measures of phonological awareness, particularly at the phoneme level, are powerful predictors of reading success and can predict early literacy performance more accurately than variable such as intelligence scores, vocabulary knowledge, and socio-economic status."

Rhyming Activity:

Pick a favourite nursery rhyme

- Review the vocabulary used in the nursery rhymes and target words the children may have difficulty understanding.

Read or recite the nursery rhyme.

- When reading, exaggerate the rhyming words. When the rhyme is finished, see if the child can identify which words rhymed.
- When re-reading the rhymes, leave out the rhyming words and let the child fill in the blank.

Source: OAFCCD 2003