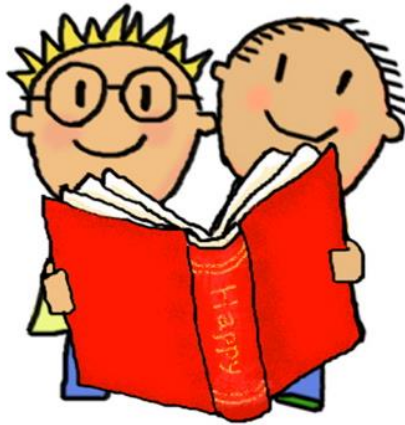


Phonics at Home

A guide for parents and carers of children in Reception

The first steps to reading and writing



Children learn a great deal from other people. As parents and carers you are your child's first teachers. You have a powerful influence on your child's early learning.

From a very early age your child will need to experience a wide range of activities and experiences with you, for example, singing and saying rhymes, making and listening to music, listening to them and joining in conversations, painting and pretend play, to develop their early reading and writing skills. These activities will help your child take the first important steps towards reading and writing.

At Lilliput we follow a phonics teaching programme called '**Essential Letters and Sounds**'. It builds on the activities the children have already experienced in their pre-school setting and prepares them for early reading and writing.

Learning to read and write in the Early Years

Foundation Stage



Children's spoken language supports reading and writing

From a very early stage, children develop an awareness of the different sounds in our spoken language. They learn to use their voices to make contact with you and to let people know what they need and how they are feeling. As parents and carers, you best understand your baby or young child's communications; you are key people in helping them develop their speaking and listening skills.

Children need lots of opportunities to talk with others as they develop and practise their speaking and listening skills. This helps to build their confidence and improves their ability to communicate with other people. This is a really important aspect of learning to socialise and will help your child feel confident when the time comes to make friends.

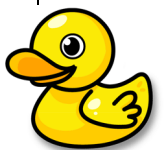
In order to make a good start in reading and writing, children need an adult to talk to and listen to them.

Everyday activities such as preparing meals, tidying up, putting shopping away and getting ready to go out, offer you chances to talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. They hear the way language is put together into sentences for a purpose.

Books are a rich source of new words for your child – words you would not use in everyday conversations appear in books. Children need to have a wide stock of words (*vocabulary*) to understand the meaning of books, so read aloud and share books as often as you can. They will enjoy it and it will be useful to them when they come across these words in their own reading later on.

Ways you can support your children at home: talking and listening

- **Make time to listen to your child talking** – as you meet them from their setting or school, as you walk, or travel home by car, in the supermarket as you shop, at meal times, bath times, bedtimes – any time!
- **Switch off the TV, radio and mobile phones** – and really listen!
- **Show that you are interested in what they are talking about** – look at your child, smile, nod your head, ask a question or make a response to show that you really have been listening.
- **Make a collection of different toy creatures** – for example, a duck, a snake, an alien, say the sound it might make as you play together, for example,, 'quack-quack', 'ssssssss', 'yuk-yuk', and encourage your child to copy you.
- **Listen at home** – switch off the TV and listen to the sounds both inside and outside the home. Can your child tell you what sounds they heard, in the order in which they heard them?
- **Play-a-tune** – and follow me! Make or buy some simple shakers, drums and beaters, then play a simple tune and ask your child to copy. Have fun!
- **Use puppets** and toys to make up stories or retell known ones. Record your child telling the story and play it back to them.



The importance of speech sounds



As children grow older they begin to understand more about the sounds of our language and they are able to join in with rhymes, songs and stories by clapping, stamping and skipping. This is an important stage as the children's ears are learning to tune into all the different sounds around them. Playing with sounds and tuning your child's ears into sounds will develop phonological awareness that is the ability to discriminate different sounds.

Overtime, this will help your child develop an understanding that words are made up of different sounds (*phonemes*) and they will be able to hear the different sounds in a word. Gradually they will learn to match sounds to letters (*graphemes*). This is phonic knowledge and they use this knowledge when they are reading and writing.

The children need to have lots of practise in recognising individual sounds. There are a number of ways in which you could do this at home. For whichever method you use the letters should be lower case.

You could:

- Use the sound sheets that we have sent home to practise the sounds and actions
- Make or buy flashcards – cards with individual sounds on them that you can quickly hold up
- Use magnetic letters on the fridge – these can be bought fairly cheaply

As well as saying the sound when shown a letter, the children need to be able to find the correct letter when given a sound. You can use the same resources listed above – for example you could say a sound and ask your child to find the correct magnetic letter/flashcard.

Alongside learning and recognising sounds we develop other phonic skills that lay the foundations for early reading and writing. These are:

- Sound talk
- Rhythm and rhyme
- Alliteration
- Blending and segmenting

There are a number of things that you can do at home to help us reinforce these skills....

1. Ways you can support your children at home: sound talk

This is a very supportive activity to play with your child.

- Try breaking down simple words when you are giving instructions or asking questions, such as ‘Can you find your h-a-t hat?’ ‘Where is the c-a-t cat?’ ‘Sit on the s-ea-t seat’ ‘Eat your f-oo-d food’. It is really important to say the sounds (*phonemes*) aloud, in order, all through the word.
- Similarly you can reverse the process: for example by saying a word such as ‘pot’ and breaking it down into its three individual sounds (*phonemes*) – ‘p-o-t’.



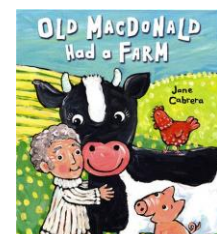
2. Ways you can support your children at home: rhythm and rhyme

- Get into the rhythm of language: bounce your child on your knee to the rhythm of a song or nursery rhyme, march or clap to a chant or poem.
- Help your child move to the rhythm of a song or rhyme.
- Read or say poems, songs, nursery songs and rhyming stories as often as you can, try to use gestures, tap regular beats and pause to emphasise the rhythm of the piece.
- Add percussion to mark the beats, using your hands, feet or instruments.
- Try out some rhythmic chanting such as ‘two, four, six, eight, hurry up or we’ll be late’ or ‘bip bop boo, who are you?’



3. Ways you can support your children at home: alliteration (words that begin with the same sound)

- Alliteration is a lot of fun to play around with. Your child’s name can be a good place to start, for example, say: ‘Carl caught a cat’, ‘Jolly Jessie jumped’, ‘Tina is talking’. Encourage other family members to have a go, for example: ‘Mummy munches muffins’, ‘Daddy is doing the dishes’.
- Emphasise alliteration in songs and stories, for example: ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers’.
- Play around with familiar songs, such as ‘Old MacDonald had some sheep, shoes, shorts, with a sh sh here and a sh sh there’, to emphasise alliteration.
- Identify the odd one out, for example, *cat*, *cup*, *boy*, *car*.
- Make up little nonsense stories together, using lots of alliteration.
- Collect items that start with the same sound from the park, the garden and around the house.
- When shopping, think about items you are buying and say: ‘a tall tin of tomatoes’, ‘a lovely little lemon’. Encourage your child to do the same.



4. Ways you can support your children at home: oral blending and segmenting

Oral blending and segmenting is a later skill that will be important when the time comes for your child to read and write. Being able to hear the separate sounds within a word and then blend them together to understand that word is really important.

Blending is a vital skill for reading. The separate sounds (*phonemes*) of the word are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word. This merging together is called *blending*. For example, the adult would say **c-a-t = cat**.

Segmenting is a vital skill for spelling. The whole word is spoken aloud, then broken up into its separate sounds (*phonemes*) in order, all through the word. For example, the adult would say **cat = c-a-t**.

To start with this should all be done orally with no expectation of matching the sound to its letter. However as the children become more confident and able to tune into the sounds they could start to use magnetic letters or letter cards to build up words (segmenting) or read simple written words (blending)



The importance of mark-making

Your child will notice adults around them reading and writing and they will want to copy them. Mark-making is the first step towards writing. Mark-making in the early stages is closely linked to physical development. The more opportunities your child has to develop large and small movement in their arms, hands and fingers, the easier it will be to make marks with a variety of tools.

Activities such as digging, ‘painting’ outdoor surfaces with water and a large brush, sweeping, and swishing a scarf through the air in different shapes will help develop large motor movement. Small or fine motor movement will be needed to hold pencils and pens correctly. Hanging out the washing and playing with pegs, using a pegboard and picking up grains of rice with fingers and tweezers will help develop the pincer grip needed for writing.

In the early stages of learning to write, your child will like to experiment, making marks on paper with a variety of writing tools such as brushes, pens, pencils and felt-tip markers. They will often include drawings with their writing. Sometimes you will write for them. It is a good idea at this stage to use lower-case letters when you write for your child, introducing capitals only for names.

Other things to do at home

- Turn off the TV so you can listen to and talk to your child.
- Read every day to your child.
- Set up a place where your child can experiment with mark-making, both outside and inside, using gloop, paint, pens, stamps and stencils onto a variety of surfaces such as paper, cardboard and material.
- Collect a variety of pencils and pens, and keep them handy for your child.
- Create a special writing bag to keep little writing tools in, for travelling in the car or visiting the doctor's. Change the contents regularly.



What to do if your child is reluctant to read or write at home

Relax! It is important not to worry if your child shows no inclination to write at home; the important thing is to keep on sharing books and talking together. There is no need to insist that your child does some writing – more often than not they will choose to do so when they have a real reason to.

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!
- Leave 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.
- Make words together using magnetic letters.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. When it 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.

We hope that you have found these ideas useful and that you will feel confident to try out some of the activities!