

## Reading



I want to come back to a topic that I wrote about a few weeks ago. I wrote about how important it is for our children to develop good phonemic awareness skills in order for them to become good readers. What are some of these skills that are so important for children to learn?

First of all, children need to be able to hear and verbally identify all the sounds in a word. If the word is *dog*, then children should listen for three sounds. You want them to be able to repeat back to you those three sounds /d/, /o/, /g/ in sort of a stretched out way. We want them to also to be able to put the stretched out sounds back into a word. For example, if they are given the sounds /b/, /u/, /g/ then they should be able to put them together into the correct sounding word *bug*. They should be able to answer questions such as, “What is the first sound you hear in *bug*? What is the last sound you hear in *cat*?” The skills of onset and rime are phonemic awareness skills that spring forth from this.

Learning and practicing those skills can become a game. You might each say the stretched out sounds of a word and have the other person guess what word it is. That makes them practice blending sounds together into words. Reversing that process can be another game. You can also play a game by thinking of different words that start with the same sound. A more difficult game is coming up with a new word that starts with the ending sound of the previous word. For example, if you give your child the word *bug*, then he or she would have to think of a word that starts with the /g/ sound. Let’s say they come up with the word *game*. The word *game* ends with the letter /e/, but it is a silent /e/. The ending sound is /m/. Therefore, the child has to think of a word that starts with an /m/, not an /e/. Another game that I’m sure you have played with your child is the rhyming game. This also helps develop phonemic awareness skills. These are the types of skills that we want preschoolers, kindergartners, and first graders to master.

So as a parent what should you do? As I’ve said before, you want to talk and talk and talk to your child. It doesn’t matter much what the topic is, you just want to be talking to them. This should start from birth. That is why some kids learn their phonemic awareness skills before they ever get to school, i.e., they have been around strong verbal environments in which there has been lots of talking and verbal interaction.

When students come to school with these types of skills they are ready to become good readers, even if they don’t know their alphabet yet.

In His Service,  
Jim Makey, Principal