

PhonoFun: Hearing the First Sound in Words

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

See our video demonstrating this activity at bipl.link/phonofun

Here are some speaking- and listening-only (no reading) activities you can do to help your child start accurately hearing the distinct sounds in words. We focus here on the first sound we hear in words, like “d” in “dog.” When your child is confident with this, you can try looking for the final sounds in words, like “d” in “bird.” (Your child does not need to know the alphabet for these activities or know anything about reading. We are only using our ears to hear what sound is there, ignoring the spelling.)

Demonstrate with examples first, having your child repeat the words and first sound after you, e.g. “We are going to find the first sounds in words, like ‘c’ in ‘cat,’ and ‘sh’ in ‘sheep.’

1. **Sound Bounce:** Think of an action (e.g. bounce), find the first sound (“b”), and make that sound as you do that action. You and your child then come up with more actions, making the action around the room while saying the first sound in the action, e.g. repeating “j” while you jump, “l” for “leap,” “w” for “wiggle,” “t” for “twist,” etc.
2. **Mealtime Sound Search:** Say the sound that starts a word for something on everyone’s plate, e.g. “b” (bread). Everyone looks for the food on their plate that starts with that sound, and takes a bite. Go around the table taking turns, so everyone gets a chance to identify a word and its starting sound. Who can find the food item first after hearing the sound?
3. **Sound Search on a Walk:** Take turns on a walk pointing to objects and finding the first sound in that object’s name. E.g. “c” for car, “t” for tree, etc.
4. **I Hear With My Little Ear:** Like with the mealtime game, say “I hear with my little ear something that starts with ‘h’” (something you see on your walk, for example). Can your child identify that “house” starts with “h?” When they feel comfortable with this, have them take the lead.

Notes

- Some of the voiced sounds are: a, b, d, e, g, l, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, qu, r, u, v, w, y, z, th (that)
- Unvoiced (whispered) sounds: c/k, f, h, p, s, t, x (“ks”), ch, sh, th (thumb)