



Tips for Parents of Kindergartners

Play with letters, words, and sounds! Having fun with language helps your child learn to crack the code of reading.

- **Say silly tongue twisters.**
Sing songs, read rhyming books, and say silly tongue twisters. These help kids become sensitive to the sounds in words.
- **Play with puppets.**
Play language games with puppets. Have the puppet say something like, "My name is Mark. I like words that rhyme with my name. I am going to say some words and I want you to tell me if they rhyme with Mark. Ready? Does *park* rhyme with *Mark*? (Stress the words *park* and *Mark*). Does *ball* rhyme with *Mark*? Does *shark* rhyme with *Mark*?" Wait for your child to answer each question, yes or no. When your child answers yes to the word *shark*, the puppet could then pretend to be a very energetic shark who, of course, wants to tickle your child.
- **Play sound games.**
Give your child practice blending individual sounds into words. For example, ask, "Can you guess what this word is? *m - o - p.*" Say the sound each letter makes rather than the name of the letter. Hold each sound longer than you normally would. This will help your child recognize the different letter sounds.
- **Use the sounds and letters in your child's name.**
Draw your child's attention to the letters in his or her name. Point out the link between letters and sounds. Say things like, "John, the word *jump* begins with the same sound as your name does. *John, jump.* And they both begin with the same letter, *J.*"
- **Trace and say letters.**
One way to help your child learn letter sounds is to have him or her use a finger to trace a letter while saying the letter's sound at the same time. You can do this on paper or in a sandbox or on a plate filled with sugar. Involving touch, sight, and speech in this way has a powerful effect on learning. Another option is for you to draw the outlines of a letter using dots and then have your child connect the dots while also saying the letter sound out loud.
- **Watch my lips.**
This may feel odd at first, but encourage your child to watch

“We can predict children's risk status in kindergarten. When we build phonological awareness skills, we improve reading ability.”

— Barbara Foorman
University of
Texas, Houston

your lips and mouth while you make certain sounds. Have your child think about how his or her own lips and tongue move. You can say something like, “Can you feel how your mouth moves the same way at the beginning of the words *mouse*, *mom*, and *man*? Watch my mouth while I say them. Now you say the words and feel your lips make the *mmm* sound.” Remember to make just one *m* sound that you hold for longer than you normally would.

- **Read it and experience**

it.

Help your child make the connection between what he or she reads in books and what happens in life. If you're reading a book about animals, for example, relate it to last month's trip to the zoo.

- **Let your child choose.**

Give your child the chance to pick his or her own books, even if the reading seems too easy. Easier books build confidence and letting children choose their own books nurtures independence and their own interests.

In order to read, young children have to learn that written words are made up of letters that also represent the sounds we speak. Reading experts call this skill “phonological awareness.” It's a lot for a five-year-old to figure out.

There are many things parents can do to help kids in this early stage of reading. Try some of the tips listed above to help your child recognize that there are different sounds in the words we speak, that letters on a page represent these different sounds, and that putting the sounds together makes words. This is a vital step on a child's road to reading.

But don't make it too serious. Mix it up, be playful, have fun with language. Remember, not only do we want kids to be able to read, we want them to *want* to read.