READY, STEADY, GROW... preparing for school

Topic: Building vocabulary and learning to read
The quality and quantity of early language experiences have a deep impact on how children learn and develop, how they access learning when they go to school and how they go on to read and succeed throughout their schooling. Enabling children to have access to a rich vocabulary will enable them to be successful in their language development. To put it simply, if you talk more your children will learn more.

The Government has identified that there is a ‘word gap’ in the Early Years which significantly impacts children in their vocabulary and reading in later life. By closing this gap through talking and reading, you are enabling your child to have the best start in their school journey.

During your time at nursery we have been supporting your child to develop in their early vocabulary skills by ensuring the nursery is ‘language rich’. By this we mean we are introducing new words to your child through our word of the week (which starts in the Ladybird room) and continually questioning and extending your child’s thought processes. We introduce and read a significant amount of literature in the form of books, poems and other media to extend vocabulary and understanding. We sing, dance and move to rhyme and music introducing rhythm to your child’s learning which also supports language development.

Opportunities to develop in their reading, and writing, are undertaken every day. Your child in pre-school has been developing their understanding of phonics. They have been learning the sounds of letters and blending these sounds to support them in the early stages of reading and writing. The programme we follow at Childbase Partnership is ‘Read, Write, Inc’.

Every child is unique, learning at their own pace and achieving developmental milestones in their own time. Some children will be able to confidentially communicate their needs, identify letters and begin to understand that letters stand for the sound heard in words. Some children may be able to identify some words. Other children may be at the beginning of their phonics journey. What is of great importance is that you continually offer ‘language rich’ experiences for your child to develop their vocabulary.

In this booklet we will focus on the following key areas:
1. **Reading with your child**
2. **Singing and rhyme**
3. **Phonics**

Primary school expectations and the support available to children in each of these areas varies greatly but we aim to provide you with information and ideas to continue the learning at home and ensure your child is fully prepared for a confident transition to school.

Your child’s Key Person in nursery will support you in the process and can answer any queries.
Overview

Building vocabulary is critical in developing good language and communication skills. It is the building block to enable your child to talk in sentences, and is really useful in enabling your child to learn to read. Research tells us that the depth of a child’s vocabulary at five years old, can tell us how well they will do at school at the age of 11. Therefore, helping your child to develop a good vocabulary is vital in their learning and development.

Learning to read is all about listening and understanding as well as being aware that print conveys meaning. By listening to stories your child is being exposed to a rich and varied vocabulary. This helps your child to build their own understanding and vocabulary and also their listening skills. Listening is very important when your child begins to read as they are listening to the sounds they are making and beginning to understand the words they are saying.

Learning lots of different words enables your child to learn to read and write. They need words to be able to understand what they read, and also to be able to make guesses for anything they do not understand. Your child will work things out by what they already know…. their vocabulary. Supporting your child in building up their vocabulary enables them to explain their ideas more clearly and communicate their needs effectively. They will also be able to follow instructions and be able to make their own decisions.
FAQ  Should my child be able read before they go to school?

The short answer is no, children do not need to be read before they go to school. Children need to know the purpose of a book, be able to hold a book, turn the pages and have an understanding that print conveys meaning. The way to develop this is by reading with your child.

At school, your child will be supported in further enhancing their vocabulary skills to be able to learn to read. Initially they will be given picture books where your child will use the pictures to tell the story. Books with words will be slowly introduced with children using their phonic knowledge to break down the words into sounds to support their reading.

Support

You are the most important educator in your child’s life. It is never too late for you to start reading with your child, even if it is only for a few minutes each day. As your child starts to show an interest in stories and books you can play an important role in keeping them interested. Provide books (fiction and non-fiction), comics, magazines and any other resources that motivate your child.

Read along with your child – make the story enjoyable. At Childbase we use story sacks to help bring the story alive. These are bags or boxes to help support the story and increase their involvement. For example, if you are reading ‘Dear Zoo’ have some zoo animals from the story – allow your child to hold, or show, the animal at parts of the story where the animal is mentioned. This will increase your child’s attention and listening of the story.

As you read the story bring the characters to life. Ask your child what they think might happen. Leave gaps in the story for your child to add their part of the story. Talk about the pictures in the story and ask lots of questions. Sharing ideas about the book will increase your child’s interest. Whilst you read with your child, they will be watching you read the story. Use expression and different tones of your voice. The more imaginative you are, to bring the story to life, the more engaged your child will be. This will most certainly develop your child’s love for books.

Audio books are also a good way for your child to listen to stories. Children’s television channels such as Cbeebies have a dedicated story session for children. On the Childbase Partnership website (www.childbasepartnership.com) we also have story telling videos for your child to listen along to.

There is no set guidance to how long and how often you should read to your child. It all depends on how engaged they are in the story. Start with short periods of time, gradually increasing as they get older and develop their love for stories. A routine will help in ensuring you develop time for reading with your child.

A bedtime story is a great way for you to spend quiet time to read to your child, helping them and you wind down after a busy day at nursery and at work. Make reading part of your family life.
Activities to try at home

The following activities can help support reading in a fun way at home:

1. Set up some story bags with props that relate to the story. This could be a toy tiger, cup and tea pot for the 'Tiger who came to tea' or a witches broom for 'Room on the Broom'. If you do not have available resources you could draw characters on wooden spoons for your child to hold up when the story is being read.

2. Create a reading area – this could be a bean bag, some cushions, or a blanket and some of your child’s favourite books.

3. Join the library – subscription is normally free.

4. Encourage your child to read you the story based on the pictures in the book – this allows them to use their gained vocabulary to tell the story. Start by using a book that you have read lots before and allow them to retell the story. Watch as they repeat the same emotion you used when reading them the story.

EXTERNAL LINKS

The following websites provide additional information which you may find useful:

www.readingrockets.org
www.literacytrust.org.uk

OUR TIPS

• Make books part of your family life – have books available at all times for your children.

• Allow your child to see you reading. If they see you enjoy reading, they will be more inclined to look at books themselves.

• Establish a routine for reading books. This will encourage and support regular reading.

• Ask questions. To keep your child interested in the story ask questions as much as you can such as ‘what do you think might happen?’ Ask them to recall what has happened. Change characters names to see if your child notices – this will help to make reading fun.

• Read again and again. Encourage your child to read their favourite books. Re-reading helps your child to build up their fluency and confidence.
Overview

There is evidence which shows that children who enjoy music, singing and rhyming on a regular basis, tend to speak more easily. They are able to express themselves clearly and are more confident and creative. Having these foundations embedded, makes reading and, eventually, spelling easier when they start school.

Children’s communication skills develop at different rates but there are many things that you can do to help your child develop the skills to read, write and communicate effectively. Singing nursery rhymes and songs to your child helps develop their language and communication skills from an early age. They create a fun environment and your child is more likely to sit and participate in singing and action songs.

Singing nursery rhymes also helps to develop your child’s social skills. At nursery we sing in small groups enabling your child to get to know the other children around them. We encourage them to take turns throughout songs and they sit next to each other and engage in play – for example during ‘row, row, row your boat’ children are encouraged to sit opposite each other holding hands.

Introducing a variety of nursery rhymes helps your child listen, learn and understand different sounds. This is an important part of developing your child’s early literacy skills. Listening to different sounds in the environment as well as in song and rhyme will provide your child with the best start in helping them to read and write.
FAQ  What can I do to support my child in reading?

Develop a love of books together. The more your child sees you read, the more they will want to also read. You are the best role model for your child.

Nursery rhymes are full of sounds. Your child tunes into these sounds and, as they get older, learns to combine and blend them together to begin forming words. Many nursery rhymes are very repetitive which can fully support your child’s listening and speaking.

Nursery rhymes provide lots of other benefits to support your child in their learning. Rhymes are a fantastic way to develop your child’s vocabulary. They are often repetitive and have a rhythmic pattern that helps children to remember and repeat. Developing your child’s awareness of sound (known as phonological awareness) enables your child to be repeatedly exposed to the spoken language through singing and rhyme.

Counting songs (e.g. Five little monkey’s) helps to develop your child’s familiarity with number names and number sounds in a fun and interesting way. By singing these sounds frequently with your child they are developing mathematical concepts and are learning to count.

Support

Sing to your child. Your child loves nothing more than hearing your voice. It doesn’t matter if you think you cannot sing, your child will love it.

When singing with your child vary your pitch and tone. This keeps it exciting for your child. It also enables them to hear the natural sounds of language. If you forget the words of a song, make them up. Your child will still be learning and developing their vocabulary. The most important thing is that you are spending time with your child singing together. Your child will enjoy listening and joining in, developing awe...
and wonder about words, and putting different words together. This helps to boost their interest in reading and writing.

The rhythm in songs can help support your child’s listening skills – the foundation from which your child develops clear speech. Your child picks up on the rhyme and rhythm of a song and benefits from the repetition of the sound. When singing with your child it is important you sing slowly and clearly so that your child can hear the sound and the word. By watching the way you say the word, your child is gaining an understanding of how the word is formed. Your child will notice the faces you pull when speaking and the way your lips form words. They will copy what you do. Nursery rhymes are designed to enable clear speech and give your child the opportunity to join in too.

Sing songs with your child which have different rhymes. Rhyme helps your child to begin to recognise patterns in words and begin to show an awareness between different sounds – for example in ‘Humpty Dumpty’ your child will be able to distinguish between the two different words ‘wall’ and ‘fall’. This will support them in sounding out words in readiness for reading.

In order for your child to fully understand the meaning of words and to be able to confidently use them as part of their own vocabulary, it is important for your child to hear words a number of times so they are fully embedded. Nursery rhymes are great as they repeat words throughout the song. Introduce new words and build them into the rhyme. This helps your child remember them and enables them to make sense of the word and use them in different context.

Activities to try at home:

The following activities can help support singing and rhyme in a fun way at home:

- Use or make musical instruments e.g. add dried chick peas to a bottle, use a saucepan and wooden spoon to make a ‘drum’ and use this whilst singing nursery rhymes. Introduce ‘loud’ and ‘soft’ and encourage your child to follow the prompt.

- With access to musical instruments, encourage your child to follow the beat of the rhythm. Can they tap out the word? For example ‘ball’ is one tap and ‘hello’ is two taps. This helps to enable your child to break down the word.

- Count or sing as you carry out a repetitive task. For example walking down the stairs, preparing breakfast or dinner or during bath time.

- Make up songs when undertaking everyday tasks. For example washing hands, putting on socks or other items of clothing.

- Introduce rhyming words such as bat. Ask your child, what sounds like bat (cat, mat, hat etc.)

- Introduce books with repeated phrases (Julia Donaldson books are great for this as are Dr Seuss, Judith Viorst and Bill Martin books).

- Introduce a ‘nursery rhyme singing basket’ with items that represent a song, for example a star (Twinkle twinkle little star), a bus (Wheels on the bus) or a black sheep (Baa baa black sheep). This will enable your child to match a prop with a song. This is particularly good if your child is predominately non-verbal. This helps them communicate their wishes through gesture and objects of reference.
OUR TIPS

• Take some time every day to sing and rhyme with your child.
• Singing together makes everyday tasks more fun and helps you to get things done quickly. For example when making the bed sing whilst doing it with your child.
• Make up silly songs. Undertaking household chores are a great way to make up silly songs together.
• Use action songs and rhymes during play.
• The most important reason to sing and rhyme with your child is that it gives them a love of language. This will help them build a strong foundation for reading, singing and rhyming and ultimately help your child to value learning.
• Action songs can help develop your child’s fine and gross motor skills.

EXTERNAL LINKS

The following website provides additional information which you may find useful:

www.theimaginationtree.com
www.ican.org.uk
Overview

The National Curriculum for schools ensures all children are taught phonics systematically. Introducing phonics to your child in their preschool year helps to prepare them for school. Children develop their language through being spoken and read to from an early age. Phonics supports the structure of language. It is a method that teaches your child to read by pronouncing sounds rather than the letters and enables your child to recognise the relationship between sounds and letters. It develops the skill your child needs in hearing the sounds in words and then corresponding them to visual representation – such as ‘a’ for apple.

At nursery, your child has already been using phonics. Phonics is taught through our prime times as well as using a range of games, songs, rhymes and activities. This introduction to phonics, and its further development in nursery, enables your child to learn to read and write easily and quickly.

At Childbase we follow the ‘Read, Write Inc’ program. This supports your child in reading and saying the English sounds. We focus on early phonics. This is the foundation needed for future phonics learning. We support your child in acquiring the ability to listen, talk about and hear the difference between sounds in the environment, instrumental sounds and voice sounds. We have been developing your child’s rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and the blending of words. Read, Write Inc uses pictures in the shape of the letter in order for your child to learn to read and write sounds easily. For example ‘s’ is a snake, ‘a’ is an apple, ‘d’ is a dinosaur and ‘m’ is two mountains.
Once children have learned sounds and can blend them together, books relating to the sounds they know, will be introduced and shared. As their knowledge of sounds grows further books are introduced to develop reading skills. All children in nursery learn the same sounds in preparation for the move to school.

Has your child talked about ‘Fred the Frog?’. Fred is a toy frog that can only say the sounds in a word. Your child helps him to read the whole word. Fred says the sound and your child says the word.

FAQ Should I sit with my child and encourage them to read?
Reading to a child and encouraging them to re-tell the story is important in extending their vocabulary and developing reading skills. Creating opportunities for your child to blend different sounds to make words enables them to develop an awareness of how words are formed.

Support
At nursery your child has been learning a small group of sounds associated with written letters. They have been taught to pronounce them as ‘pure sounds’ for example m not muh, f not fuh and l not luh. By learning the sound it enables your child to put the sounds together to make a word. They have then been taught to blend the word, for example m-a-t makes ‘mat’. Your child has been continually learning new sounds and has been blending them to make words.

You can help your child at home by learning how to say the sounds. Our Childbase Partnership website (www.childbasepartnership.com) has a video section under the home learning tab. Here you will see all the sounds for you to practice at home with your child.

We use flashcards in our nurseries to support your child with identifying the letter, reading the letter and sounding the letter. We then use a number of flash cards to help blend the sounds to make words.

When you are reading with your child, look at the letters and say the initial sound of the letters. You can then blend these together to make the word.

Developing your child’s understanding of phonics helps make reading easy for them. It is important that you read correctly spelled, English language books to your child. Some of the books we introduce at your child’s nursery are ‘The Gruffalo’, ‘We’re going on a bear hunt’, ‘Where the wild things are’ as well as fairy tale stories such as ‘The three little pigs’. These types of books help to develop your child’s vocabulary and understanding.
Within the Read, Write Inc. programme there are six ‘sound blending phases’ for your child to complete by the end of their reception year in Primary School.

In nursery we cover the first two phases. Your child learns speed sounds m, a, s, d and t (Phase 1) before blending them into actual words they can identify (Phase 1). You can extend nursery learning at home by encouraging your child to say these sounds in, and out of, order. Make it into a game. Encourage your child to say the sounds quickly. Lay the cards on a table and spell out a word such as m-a-t and point to the card as you and your child say the sounds. They will then be able to say the word sounds. Repeat this with sad, mad, dad, sat and at.

Once your child is familiar with these, move on to sound blending with new speed sounds l, n, p, g and o (Phase 2) when the process of familiarisation is exactly the same until your child is confident with the new sounds.

‘Sound Blending’ brings Phases 1 and 2 together. Use the sounds d-o-g and point to the card as you and your child say the sounds. Repeat until your child is able to read the word and then do the same with dig, pin, pan, on, it and top.

Activities to try at home

The following activities can help support phonics practice in a fun way at home:

1. Make sure you pronounce the speech sounds clearly using the ‘pure sound’.
2. Play fun phonic games – for example ‘I spy with my little eye something that begins with the sound...’ or ‘what can you find that begins with the sound...?’
3. Sing rhymes and play rhyming games.
4. Continue to read with your child as often as you can.

OUR TIPS

- Read with your child often.
- Continue with song and rhyme activities.
- Talk lots with your child. Make sure you pronounce words clearly. Where possible, look at your child while you are talking to them so they can see how your lips move and change as you speak.

EXTERNAL LINKS

The following websites provide additional information which you may find useful:

www.oxfordowl.co.uk
www.ruthmiskin.com
www.childbasepartnership.com
How many words should children know and by when?

Children will understand many words before they are able to say them. This is why it is important that you continue to talk to your child so they can understand it’s meaning before they begin to actually use the words.

• Children say their first words around the age of one. Before this children may babble.
• By about 18 months children should use around 20 words.
• By the age of two years old, it is expected children will be able to say 50 words. However, they will be able to understand between 200 and 500.
• By three years old children should be able to use around 300 words.
• By the time a child reaches five years old they will know and use as many as 2,500 words.

(data sourced from ICAN)

What can I do to ensure my child is developing language?

A way of tracking your child’s vocabulary is by keeping a word diary to see how much your child says throughout the day. Oxford Brookes University have created a mobile app which you can use to track the vocabulary development of your child. Parents of bilingual babies can also use the app to track the development of their children. The app covers 16 differing languages. Further information on this can be found at www.brookes.ac.uk.
How many times does my child need to hear a word for them to understand it?

Children learn new language very quickly. Between the ages of two and six, they average 10 new words a day. By using the words only a few times, then building it into every day language, your child will learn new words fast.

Do I need to set up activities to support my child’s vocabulary?

Helping your child to learn new words needs to be part of your everyday routine. There is no real need to have ‘activity’ time to support the teaching of words. Reading and talking with your child is instrumental in developing your child’s vocabulary and understanding. The more you read and talk with your child, the more they will know and understand. It really is as simple as that.

What books are good to support my in helping my child to develop their vocabulary?

Oxford Owl have a free eBook library (www.oxfordowl.co.uk). These books have been developed for children from the age of 3 years old. On their website they also have a section to support you in developing your child’s phonics through the Read, Write inc programme. Visit www.oxfordowl.co.uk for access to your free eBooks.

How else can I develop my child’s vocabulary?

Your child can learn new words through play. Encourage your child to act out stories. Adding puppets can help with this process bringing your child’s imagination alive. Singing, rhyme times, music and movement all help in supporting your child in developing their vocabulary. When you are out walking with your child talk about what you see, ask questions and introduce them to new words and concepts. For example instead of saying ‘look a puddle’ extend it by saying ‘can you make a splash in the puddle?’ – you have introduced the word ‘splash’. If you see wet mud, increase your child’s vocabulary by saying ‘squelchy, sticky mud’. All these extra words will support you in developing your child’s vocabulary.