Playing With Words

To understand a spoken language, a child must be able to hear the different sounds and parts of the words that make up the language. By playing with words and sounds children develop “phonological awareness.” Most children who have phonological awareness have an easier time when they begin to learn to read later on.

Here’s what you can do:

- Sing songs with your child every day. Songs naturally break words into syllables and are a fun way to learn about word sounds. In most songs, each syllable in a word gets a different note.
- Say nursery rhymes so that your child hears words that rhyme. Emphasize the rhyming words.
- Add actions, such as clapping, as you sing a song or say a poem. This helps your child break down language into separate words.
- Make up your own nonsense rhymes and silly songs.
- Play word games with your toddler, such as “What sounds like ‘ran’?” or “What starts with the same sound as ‘ball’?”
- Read and re-read stories your child enjoys.
- Catch your child’s attention by repeating the sounds he likes to say. Then change the first letter to make a new silly word: Baa-baa becomes la-la.
- Talk with your young child throughout the day.
- Say rhymes and sing songs in the language most comfortable for you.

Book of the Month

Old MacDonald, written and illustrated by Rosemary Wells

This wonderfully illustrated version of the popular song will have your little one quacking and mooing all day long!

Rosemary Wells has written and illustrated over 120 books and has won several awards. Here are some of her board books:

Good books to help your child begin to play with words...

Rhyming books
Nursery Rhyme books, such as Mother Goose
Songs that have been turned into books
Poetry books
Books with animal sounds
Books that have repeating words or sounds
Books that have rhythm
More fun with Old Mac Donald

Talk about it... The last pages of the book give suggestions for other animal sounds. Ask your child, “Where is the pig?” Help him point. “What does a pig say? That’s right, oink, oink!” Then sing the song again with the pig sounds. Stop when your child begins to lose interest. This is a great song to sing in the car or in the stroller!

Music and movement: Put some rhythm into the song or in nursery rhymes! Bounce, clap, tap, stomp, drum, jump, snap... Giving each part of the word a beat will help your young child learn to break words into syllables.

Song for Baby
Cows in the Barn
(to the tune of “Wheels on the Bus”)
(Sing along with baby bouncing on your knee.)

The cows in the barn go moo, moo, moo, moo, moo, moo.
All day long.

Additional verses:
The ducks in the pond go quack, quack, quack...
The sheep in the field go baa, baa, baa...
The piggies in their pens go oink, oink, oink...

Rima para bebé
Dulce Canta el Burro

Dulce canta el burro al ir a comer.
Si no lo cuidamos, él rebuznará.
Cají, cajó, cajá, cají, cajó, cajá,
Cají, cajó, cajaaaaaá,
cají, cajó, cajá.
(Se repite)

What your library can do for you...
Ask your librarian about story times and other programs that are offered for babies and toddlers. Most story times for young children focus on rhymes and sounds.

Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes are a simple and easy way to help your child build rhyming skills. Research suggests that children who know lots of nursery rhymes before they begin school tend to find more success with learning to read. You can find books of nursery rhymes at your local library.

Hickory, Dickory Dock
The mouse ran up the clock.
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down.
Hickory, Dickory, Dock.

Online Resources

Denver Public Library’s podcasts of nursery rhymes and other stories:
http://podcast.denverlibrary.org/

Sites with nursery rhymes and activities:
www.teachersandfamilies.com/nursery/index.html
www.rif.org/leadingtoreading/en/

Funding for this project is made possible by the Idaho Commission for Libraries’ Read to Me program, and the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under a provision of the Library Services and Technology Act.

Printed 2010