Playing with Words

Children love to play, and when they play with words, and the smaller sounds in words, they are developing an early literacy skill called **phonological awareness**. Recognizing when words rhyme and hearing the beginning sounds of words are things that help children learn to read later on.

Here’s what you can do at home:

- Sing songs with your child every day. Songs 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. “Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are.”
- Add actions, such as clapping or bouncing, as you sing a song or say a poem.
- Help your child learn the sounds animals make.
- Make up your own nonsense rhymes and silly songs.
- 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 child throughout the day.
- Read and re-read stories your child enjoys.
- Say rhymes and sing songs in the language most comfortable for you.

Book of the Month

**Wee Sing: Children’s Songs and Fingerplays,**
by Pamela Conn Beall and Susan Hagen Nipp

This special book and music CD of popular children’s songs will help parents and caregivers learn lots of songs to sing with their children. Whether you’re singing along with the CD or singing from memory, singing with your young child every day will help her develop important skills that she will need when it is time to learn to read.

Co-author Susan Hagen Nipp lives in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. In addition to producing many other Wee Sing CDs, she wrote *Mudgy and Millie*, a book about a mouse and a moose who play hide and seek around Coeur d’Alene.

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 *Wee Sing*...

**Homemade instruments...**

- Drum — coffee can with lid or oatmeal tub
- Maracas (shakers) — water bottles or juice cans filled about 1/3 full with rice or dry beans. Seal the top with paper and tape.
- Tambourine — seal two aluminum pie pans or sturdy paper plates together with duct tape, after putting a small handful of dry beans inside.
- Rhythm sticks — hit two wooden spoons or pencils together

**Singing with Your Child**

A common reason grown-ups don’t sing with children is that they don’t think they have a good singing voice. But young children don’t really know a good singing voice from a bad one; they just want you to sing with them!

Here are some ways you can help your children get ready to read by singing with them:

- Sing the alphabet song to learn about letters.
- Sing nursery rhymes so children hear the different sounds in words.
- Practice singing and rhyming at home, in the car, while you play, and during “wait” times in lines or at the doctor’s office.
- Clap along to the rhythms in songs so children hear the syllables in words. Here is an example:

  **Twink-le  twink-le  lit-tle  star,**

  How I won-der what you are.

  🖐️ 🖐️ 🖐️ 🖐️ 🖐️ 🖐️

**Sing Silly Songs**

**Row, Row, Row Your Boat**

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.

*Now make up new words to the song...*

Row, row, row your car...

*Or make up silly words...*

Tow, tow, tow my goat...

*Nonsense words...*

Bow, bow, bow my doat...

*Sing about where you are going or what you are doing...*

Wash, wash, wash my hands...
Walk, walk, walk to school...

**What your library can do for you...**

Check at your library for CDs and DVDs of children’s songs. You can find special holiday music or songs you can sing year-round!

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