

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

Fun and Games with Sounds

 Rhymes and Sound Awareness

One skill a child needs to read is an understanding of how sounds go together to form words. This guide includes early word games that help toddlers see how sounds form words. This is an important building block for later reading.

What is the practice?

Help toddlers develop an early understanding of how sounds go together to form words by playing sound and word games. These fun activities help toddlers see the connections between various sounds and the words they can make.



What does the practice look like?

Playing with sounds (*ma-ma* and *da-da*) to make “new” words or silly sounds is fun. It also helps your toddler understand that letters represent different sounds that can be combined into words. Your toddler learns that these sounds can be put together in various ways to create new words. It’s an important early step toward reading.

How do you do the practice?

Opportunities to learn about sounds in words occur during ordinary activities like changing clothes or taking a bath.

- Think about the things your child likes to say and do. Often young children have a word or sound that they say again and again just because it’s fun. For example, some toddlers love to make animal sounds such as *baa*, *meow*, or *woof*. Other children may like to make up silly names for their pets, dolls, or family members. Catch your toddler’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*.
- Word play can happen on the spur of the moment as part of your toddler’s everyday routines. For example, if while taking a bath or riding in the car your toddler begins to make a sound, you can repeat the sound. Encourage him to say it back to you. When it’s your turn, change the sound a little bit. Then ask your toddler if he can say it too. Encourage your toddler to repeat the sound you made or say a new one. Show your enjoyment as the game continues.
- As your toddler’s speech strengthens, begin to put words together in short sentences with the same sound. For example, “Did the doggie dig?” Laugh about the funny sound of “doggie dig” and ask your toddler to repeat the phrase.
- Show your toddler that he did well by smiling and commenting on his efforts. A little encouragement will keep your toddler playing the game longer. Be sure you stop when he tires of the game.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your toddler starting to “play” with individual sounds or words?
- Does your toddler seem pleased when he is trying to make or copy your sounds?
- Has your toddler shown interest in trying new sounds and words?

Take a look at more fun with sound

Word Fun on Wheels

Riding in a car is often a great opportunity for Maya and her mother to play word games. While riding along, 18-month-old Maya begins making sounds like *ba-ba-ba*. Her mom, following Maya's lead, repeats Maya's *ba-ba-ba* and adds her own *pa-pa-pa*. She asks Maya if she can say *ba-ba-ba* and *pa-pa-pa*. Maya loves playing *ba-ba-ba* and will repeat the sounds to get her mom to do it some more.



Rhyming Game

Nathan's dad plays a word game with him that includes lots of movement. Nathan, a 28-month-old, loves to move. They call their game *Drop/Hop*. First, Nathan's dad teaches him to hop up and down when he says "Hop." He shows Nathan how to drop to the floor when he says "Drop." He teaches him to put his hand on his head when he says "Top." Finally, he shows him to clap his hands when he says "Pop." When they play their *Drop/Hop* game, Nathan's dad asks who should be the leader first. Nathan usually wants to be first. He tells his dad to drop and they both fall on the ground. Then his dad tells him to hop and they do. They continue to play back and forth until they both get tired.

Word and Sound Play

Jenna, a toddler with a mild hearing impairment, loves to play with her dad while swinging in the park. Her dad picks a word Jenna can say. He says it in different ways: loud, soft, slow (stretching the sounds out), fast (saying the syllables quickly), and singing. Each time, Jenna repeats the word the same way her dad said it. Often Jenna will say another word. They play with that word the same way, with Jenna taking the lead. Jenna loves the word game on the swing, and it helps her listen to the difference between sounds.

