**Phonics Advice for Parents**

0

**North Duffield community primary school**

N

**(from Reading Planets Rocket Phonics website)**

While teachers will undergo training to learn how to properly convey teaching methods, the same isn’t true of most parents. They aren’t expected to be classroom professionals, but there are still ways in which mums, dads or other guardians can lend a helping hand at home. Unfortunately, there will also be challenges. Let’s look at some hurdles, and how you might overcome them.

**The impact of different accents**

If you’ve moved abroad, young children might face the difficulties of trying to learn a language with the additional challenge of having to adapt to a new accent. This might not even be internationally – many regions have very different dialects.

There’s nothing wrong with a child picking up a slight twang of another accent, but it might make it hard for them to recognise specific phonemes in the classroom.

For example, someone in the south of England might pronounce the word “bus” with the traditional /u/ phoneme in the middle. Whereas someone from the North, let’s say Newcastle, would pronounce it with the central phoneme sounding more like an /oo/ (as in look).

Naturally, this could be confusing – especially if their parents are looking to teach them at home. If you’re such a parent, it might be wise to go and talk to the school about phonics.

A simple solution to the challenge provided by accents and dialects is to use the following phrase with children… “In this country/region/place, people pronounce that word like this…”

**Challenges faced with phonics**

It’s not uncommon for children to struggle with certain aspects of phonics. While teachers will go a long way to helping kids tackle these issues, there are steps you can also take at home to make things better for all involved. Let’s take a look at some challenges a child might face, and the best way of dealing with it:

* Guessing word endings – It’s not uncommon for kids to guess the end of the word by looking at only the beginning. This trick sometimes works and as such, encourages a child to try it again – often to negative effect.
**Solution: A potential answer here is to go back to basics. Make sure they’re splitting up the word into its original phonemes before they blend it together. If you catch them making this mistake, explain to them what they’re doing.**
* Struggling with tricky words – Tricky, or exception, words are not as easy to grasp because they don’t conform to the regular rules of phonics. For example, they’re spelt one way but sound completely different when said out loud, for example, one, two, any.
**Solution: One strategy here is to look for and point out the tricky words in a sentence before they read it. This pre-emptive strategy means when they get to the challenging word in question, their flow won’t be interrupted, as they’ve already covered it. This means you as a parent will also need to recognise these tricky words. The recommended way to teach tricky words is to point out to the child which parts of the word can be decoded easily using the phonics they know and which specific part is tricky or unusual.**
* Confusion with graphemes – On a similar note, there are some graphemes which might on the surface appear quite confusing. Examples could include ‘ai’, ‘oi’ and oa’.
**Solution: The best way of addressing this would be to make sure you teach or reteach each of the graphemes separately, and go back and practice the ones you’ve already covered separately.**

As we pointed out, it’s largely the duty of a school to ensure children learn the alphabetic code well– but, if you are a parent who wants to take on the challenge yourself, make sure to bear some of these factors in mind.

**Learning resource**

A great resource for practising phonics – both in the home and at school for teachers – is [Rising Stars Rocket Phonics](https://www.risingstars-uk.com/Subjects/Reading-and-Ebooks/Rising-Stars-Reading-Planet/Rocket-Phonics). This is a strand of Reading Planet, which has been designed to promote reading skills across the board at primary level.

The series comes with a variety of benefits, all included within 48 reading books. These include:

* Accessible guidance for parents on using the books at home
* Teaching support for educators
* Comprehension questions and exercises with follow-up activities

Perhaps most importantly, teachers will be provided with guides giving them clear instruction on how and what to teach. These guides will typically include:

* Guided reading ideas
* Speech rhythm activities
* Assessment guidance

The stories contained within the books are largely fiction, with the key phonemes covered highlighted within the book. This makes finding the right example quick and easy for parents and teachers alike.

**Phonics games**

While you’ll be able to find a series of enjoyable online games to play, it’s also important to encourage a child to get involved with hands-on learning. Engaging directly with what’s in front of them can only have a positive impact.

As such, it might be a good idea to think about trying some of the following games:

* **Speed Reading** – Write a list of pre-prepared words clearly and neatly on the main whiteboard, and ask the children to read through them before the game starts. Next, ask the children to watch the board as you read back the words in a random order, quickly. Their job is to notice which word you didn’t say.
* **Phonics Bingo** – Draw up a grid with six sections for everyone, and then write out a series of graphemes in a place everyone can see. Let the children pick the six graphemes they want to include on their board. Next draw pieces of paper from a hat. Make sure the graphemes on them correspond to the ones that have been written down. Call out the phoneme that corresponds to the grapheme on the paper drawn from the hat. Children can tick off the section on their grid if it contains the grapheme that matches the phoneme you called out. The key here is the necessity to recognise the letter-sound correspondences (don’t show them the paper).
* **Find the sound** – Put a picture of something (for example a cat) on a board. Underneath the picture draw dashes to represent the number of sounds in the word. Ask children to work left to right all through the word to identify and write the letters needed to spell out the word for the picture.
* **Hat and ball game** – A hat and ball are passed around a room. The hat contains graphemes. Music is played, and when it stops the person holding the hat has to take out a piece of paper and say the phoneme that corresponds to the grapheme on it. The child with the ball has to say what letters this grapheme is comprised of. This game will work best in a large group.

These are just a handful of the amazing games you can use to help teach phonics. Try a few out for yourself, or even consider coming up with your own if you’re creative enough.