Teaching “Breaking Words Into Phonemes” (Phonemic Awareness) – The Fifth and Final Step in Teaching Phonological Awareness

*** It is important, when teaching this skill, that you keep in mind the complexity of the task. Breaking words into phonemes is learning to hear the smallest units of sound and is not at all easy. Your child may need lots of your patience and encouragement to be successful, so keep this in mind as you work with him/her.***

*** Again, remember not to teach this skill until your child has become good at listening, rhyming, breaking sentences into words and words into syllables. If you have questions about whether to move your child to this level, please see Gayle Hernandez or Vicki Moro and we are happy to have a conversation with you to help you feel comfortable in what you are doing.***

What Are Phonemes?

- They are the smallest units of sound in our language. For example, the phonemes in “chick” are /ch/i/k/. Note that there are 5 letters but only 3 sounds. The phonemes in “big” are /b/i/g/. There are 3 letters and 3 sounds. In “dinosaur” the phonemes are /d/i/n/o/s/au/r/. There are 8 letters and 7 sounds. How confusing!!! This is why you should only teach up to 3 phonemes (or sounds) at this age level.

- When we are teaching children to break words into phonemes, we are teaching them to hear the units of sound so that when they get to printing and reading
words they can figure out what sounds to “hang” onto clusters of letters.

- When teaching this skill, keep in mind that there are 3 stages that should be taught in order.

1. Teach your child to hear and identify the first sound in words. (I.e. “b” as in “big”, “l” as in “lost” or “m” as in “mop”)

2. Teach your child to hear and identify the last sound in words. (I.e. “n” as in “win”, “k” as in “lick” or “p” as in “top”)

3. Teach your child to hear and identify the middle sound in words. (I.e. “o” as in “dog”, “ee” as in “keep” or “a” as in “tan”.)

Following are some ideas you can use to help your child develop the ability to break words into phonemes. Remember to teach the steps in order. For example, don’t go on to the last sounds of words until your child can comfortably hear and identify the first sounds in words. When your child can comfortably hear and identify the first and last sounds of words, move onto the middle sounds. ***Remember you are working with sounds and NOT letter names***

Good luck, have fun, and keep in mind that this skill is hard to “get your head around”. See Vicki Moro or Gayle Hernandez if you want some help feeling comfortable with what you are doing before beginning with your child.
1) **What Do You Hear?**

- Teach the following song to the tune of “London Bridge Is Falling Down”.

  **Adult:** “What’s the first sound that you hear? That you hear? That you hear? What’s the first sound that you hear? In dog, dog, dog?”

  **Student:** “/d/ is the first sound that I hear, That I hear, that I hear. /d/ is the first sound that I hear at the beginning of “dog”.”

- Repeat the song using other words until your child begins to be able to comfortably identify beginning sounds of words.

- Modify the song then to focus on ending sounds in words.

  **Adult:** What is the last sound that you hear? That you hear? That you hear? What is the last sound that you hear? In tin, tin, tin?”

  **Student:** “/n/is the last sound that I hear, That I hear, that I hear.” Etc.

- Once your child is comfortable hearing and identifying both beginning and ending sounds, modify the song again to focus on middle sounds in words.
2) What Big Ears You Have!

- Use Mickey Mouse Ears to help your child with this one. Using fingers up on the head or “cupping” hands around the ears would work, also! 😊 The “ears” are meant to help emphasize the importance of listening to sounds.

- Teach your child the following verse:

  Child: “Listen, listen, loud and clear
         What’s the first sound that I hear?”

  Adult: “Doggie, dolly, dark and daddy. Tell me, tell me, what do you hear?”

  Child: “/D/! /D/! /D/! /D/! That’s the first sound that I hear!”

- Repeat with new word patterns such as “bottle, baby, box and bubble”, “candy, carry, car and cuddle” or “fiddle, froggie, fox and freezie”, until your child shows s/he can identify the sounds with ease.

- Repeat the verse to work on identifying ending sounds. (For example, Child: “Listen, listen, loud and clear, what’s the last sound that I hear?” Adult: “Book, duck, dark and click. Tell me, tell me, what do you hear?” Child: “k”, “k”, “k” and “k”. That’s the last sound that I hear!”

- Finally, repeat the verse to work on identifying middle sounds. (For example, Child: “Listen, listen, loud and clear. What’s the middle sound that I hear?” Adult: “Dog, moss, lost and sock. Tell me, tell me, what do
you hear?" Child: "/o/", "/o/" "/o/" and "/o/". That’s the middle sound that I hear!"") Note that middle sounds are very hard to hear, so have your child look in the mirror at what the mouth is doing while the sounds and letters are being made.

- Here are a few word patterns to get you started. You might want to come up with a few of your own once you get the idea to add variety and to add new letters for your child to identify the sounds of. Using the dictionary might help you with ideas for new words to use.

**Beginning Sounds:**

- **Gull**, give, goat and gas (/g/)
- **Ham**, have, hold and hen (/h/)
- **Dog**, duck, down and day (/d/)
- **Lazy**, lace, lamb and leg (/l/)
- **Jelly**, job, jump and joy (/j/)
- **Kit**, kiss, kind and king (/k/)
- **Mad**, make, mind and man (/m/)
- **Nod**, near, no and name (/n/)

**Ending Sounds:**

- **Sink**, dunk, risk and look (/k/)
- **Next**, nest, set and sent (/t/)
- **Bed**, glad, land and hid (/d/)
- **Big**, log, rag and tug (/g/)
- **Lawn**, pen, brown and fan (/n/)
- **Days**, lens, rows and sees (/s/)
- **Water**, fear, shear and cover (/r/)
• Wheel, fail, equal and heal (/l/)

Middle Sounds:

• Tie, file, five and dime (/i/)
• Rise, like, hide and kite (/i/)
• Joke, nose, hope and cone (/o/)
• Short, corn, more and worn (/or/)
• Purr, curl, surf and turn (/ur/)
• Shook, foot, wood and hook (/oo/)
• Bad, bag, dad and lap (/a/)
• Bud, bun, dug and mud (/u/)

Remember that these middle sounds are very tricky. Please see either Vicky or Gayle for help if you need it. Promise???? Hee hee hee!!! We are here to help. Please keep this in mind!!!

Hopefully this will give you an idea. Let us know if we can help in any way! 😊