

Key Guidance: Foundations for Phonics

Phonological awareness – the ability to focus on the sounds rather than the meaning of language and to distinguish rhyme, syllables and initial sounds – can be seen as the foundation of phonics. As children tune into the sounds of language, they gain an awareness of the fact that within sentences there are words, and within words there are sounds.

Phonemic awareness – the ability to recognise and play around with those sounds – helps children when they later encounter the grapheme–phoneme correspondences in Reception.

‘Research tells us that by developing children’s phonemic awareness we lay the foundations for word reading’ (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012). There has also been a ‘clear relationship established between children’s early knowledge of nursery rhymes and their later success in reading and spelling’ (Bryant et al., 1989).

Foundations for Phonics forms part of the Little Wandle Foundations programme. It provides you with planning, resources and training to support you to develop your children’s phonological and phonemic awareness through the repeated singing of nursery rhymes and linked adult-led activities. Foundations for Phonics has been designed to be used alongside Foundations for Language and Foundations for a Love of Reading, as part of your wider Communication and Language and Literacy provision.

What will my children learn with Foundations for Phonics?

By following the suggested planning and progression guidance, you will ensure your Nursery children learn how to:

- listen carefully to sounds and describe them
- recognise and make rhymes
- identify syllables within words
- identify initial sounds
- understand alliteration
- orally blend and segment
- join in and recite nursery rhymes.

These skills are aligned with what Development Matters suggests should be the learning focus for three- and four-year-olds:

Develop their phonological awareness, so that they can:

- spot and suggest rhymes
- count or clap syllables in a word
- recognise words with the same initial sound, such as money and mother.

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How do I fit Foundations for Phonics into my weekly provision?

There are two types of activities, taking a total of a maximum of 10 minutes to complete:

- **Tuning into sounds: (5 minutes)**
 - 1 x phonemic awareness activity
 - AND 1 x oral blending activity
- **Rhyme time: (5 minutes)**
 - 1 x Rhyme time song
 - 1 x Rhyme time activity

We recommend that you do both 'Tuning into sounds' and 'Rhyme time' activities **daily**. However, some settings choose to only do one Foundations for Phonics activity each day, **alternating between 'Tuning into sounds' and 'Rhyme time'**. Sessions must be run a minimum of three times weekly.

The most important thing is that all your children get plenty of practice with the full range of phonological skills. Some children might need more practice than others and, for this reason, we suggest that you run the sessions in **small groups**.

It will be much easier to address misconceptions through Assessment for Learning and meet the needs of individuals in the group. Consider using all your staff members to run these groups at the same time if possible. Alternatively, repeat the sessions with different groups of children during continuous provision.

For timetabling ideas, please see our separate 'Foundations timetabling guidance'.

What is included in the 'Tuning into sounds' part of Foundations for Phonics?

There are nine 'Tuning into sounds' activities in total:

- **5 x phonological awareness games:**
 - Play with sounds
 - Bertha the bus goes to the zoo
 - Name play
 - Voice sounds
 - What's in the box?
- **4 x oral blending games:**
 - Blend from the box
 - Can you touch your ... ?
 - What's that noise?
 - Can you do the action?

For each game, there is a 'How to' video and a prompt card describing the teaching steps. The progression and planning overview helps you know what to teach when.

What is included in the 'Rhyme time' part of Foundations for Phonics?

There are 20 nursery rhyme films. For each nursery rhyme there is a planning template, which includes some of 10 possible phonological awareness activities:

- What's the sound?
- Sound patterns
- Tap the syllables
- Which word rhymes?
- Play with words
- Join in
- Say it silly
- Odd one out
- Voice sound
- Fast/slow/loud/quiet

The nursery rhyme planning incorporates step-by-step teaching steps. There are also suggestions for linked activities in the provision and linked texts.

How can I involve families with Foundations for Phonics?

Families can help the development of children's phonological awareness significantly in the following ways:

- singing nursery rhymes
- drawing their child's attention to initial sounds
- making up rhymes and songs
- playing oral blending games.

To help families understand the Little Wandle Foundations for Phonics approach, we provide the following resources for you to share with families:

- Foundations for Phonics parent presentation
- Foundations for Phonics parent handout
- Nursery rhyme handouts.