

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

# Sound Ideas

*Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

In order for a child to read, he must have an understanding of how sounds go together to make different words. This practice guide includes early word games to help toddlers understand how sounds combine to form words, which is an important building block for later reading.

## What is the practice?

You can help toddlers develop an early understanding of how sounds go together to form words through playing sound and word games. These activities help toddlers “make the connection” between how various sounds can go together to form words.

## What does the practice look like?

A toddler’s experimentation with sounds (such as **ma-ma** and **da-da**) to make “new” words or silly sounds helps him understand that letters have different sounds and can be combined into different words. A toddler learns that these sounds can be put together in different ways to create new words, which is an important emergent literacy skill.



## How do you do the practice?

There are many different opportunities for learning about sounds in words as a child plays with toys, eats lunch, or takes a walk.

- Start by thinking about what he enjoys doing and saying. Often young children have a word or sound that they say repeatedly. For example, some toddlers really like to make animal sounds such as *baa*, *meow*, or *woof*. Other children may like to make up silly names for their animals, dolls, or family members. Get your toddler’s attention by saying the sounds the toddler likes to make. After he repeats the sound, change the first letter to make a new silly word: *baa baa* becomes *ha ha*.
- Word plays can be done with toddlers in lots of different situations and often happen spontaneously. For example, if while in the yard you see a worm on the ground, get the toddler to say “worm.” Make up a little rhyme like “Wormy, wormy, squiggly, squirmy.” Say it together as you watch the worm.
- As the toddler’s skills strengthen, 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 encourage the toddler to repeat the phrase.
- Show the toddler that he did well by smiling and commenting on his efforts. A little encouragement will keep him playing longer, but be sure to stop when he tires of the game.

## How do you know the practice worked?

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

## Take a look at more fun and games with sounds

### *Hop Drop Game*

Janice, an early childhood specialist in a class full of energetic children, remembers a game she has used before to engage active toddlers. Janice tells the teacher about the **Hop Drop Game**. First, the teacher introduces the words *drop*, *hop*, *top*, *pop* to the children, showing them the action that goes with each word—*Hop* up and down; *drop* to the floor; put hands on *top* of their heads; and *pop* hands together in a clap. After all the children know the motions, she calls out one word after another while the children do the movements. After the children get the idea, she lets them take the lead. It becomes a class favorite, with someone always asking for the *Hop Drop Game* and wanting to be the leader.



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### *Rearranging Sounds*

The home visitor regularly visits with Miguel and his mom. Miguel, who is 19 months old, makes lots of sounds, some of which are “real words” and some just sounds. The home visitor is helping Mom figure out ways to rearrange these sounds and to make them fun to play with. Miguel often sits in his seat in the kitchen near Mom while she fixes dinner. Miguel begins cooing, and Mom comes close, cooing back at him. Miguel coos again and Mom repeats. Mom goes back to her task, but in a few minutes returns to start the game with a new sound like *ma-ma*, then she changes it to *baa-baa*. Miguel smiles and responds to his mom, showing how much he enjoys the game.

### *Tickle Game*

Sean is just learning to say single words though he is almost 3 years old. His favorites are *Mama*, *Dada*, and *baha* (for ball). To encourage him to play with the sounds, his mom and their home visitor have made a tickle game a favorite activity for Sean. Mom and Dad take turns with him. First Mom leans in close and wiggles her fingers to encourage Sean to say *Mama*, *Mama*. When he does, she tickles him, resulting in loud laughter. Then it is Dad’s turn to get Sean to say *Dada*, *Dada*.

