Helping Your Child Hear the First Sounds in Words

Key points

- Phonics is the method schools use to teach children how to read and write by linking sounds to letters.
- Before children match sounds to letters, they first need to develop listening skills to hear the individual sounds in spoken words.
- Recognising the first sound in a word, such as the 's' in 'sun', is a vital foundation for later reading.
- Oral blending is the skill of hearing separate sounds and putting them together to make a word, which happens before formal reading begins.
- Every child develops at their own pace, and focusing on listening first helps make later learning feel easier.
- Because every school follows its own specific timetable, you can ask your child's teacher about the phonics stages they are currently covering.

Things to try at home

- Play a gentle game of 'I Spy' using the first sound of an object, such as 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with sss'.
- While tidying up, name a few toys and see if your child can spot which one starts with a specific sound.
- During a walk, listen for sounds in the environment and see if you can find things nearby that start with that same sound.
- Read a favourite story together and occasionally pause to highlight the first sound of a funny or exciting word.

Find out more

- Your child's class teacher or the school's phonics lead.
- The GOV.UK website for official guidance on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum.