

Fred Talk and Sound Buttons: Helping Your Child Blend Sounds Into Words

Key points

- "Fred Talk" and "sound buttons" are names some phonics schemes use for ways of helping children blend separate sounds together to read a word.
- Blending means saying each sound in a word on its own, then joining them smoothly so the word comes out whole – for example c-a-t becomes "cat".
- Sound buttons are small dots or lines printed under letters in a reading book, showing which sounds to say before blending them.
- Phonics schemes differ between schools, so the exact names, pictures or symbols your child brings home may not match what another family describes – their teacher can tell you what your child's school uses.
- This way of blending is part of synthetic phonics teaching, which schools in England are expected to use when teaching children to read.
- It's completely normal if you weren't taught to read this way yourself – most parents weren't, so the terms can feel unfamiliar at first.

Things to try at home

- If your child's book has dots or lines under letters, point to each one together and say the sounds before blending them into the word.
- Turn everyday instructions into a playful sound game – say a word sound by sound, like "t-i-m-e for bed", and see if your child enjoys blending it back together.
- Keep reading time short and relaxed – a few minutes with a book your child enjoys matters more than how long you sit together.
- Use whatever approach is written in your child's reading diary or school letters, rather than a different method you remember from your own schooling.
- Notice and encourage any attempt at blending, even a slow or wobbly one – enjoyment and confidence come before speed.

Find out more

- Your child's teacher or the school's phonics lead can show you exactly which scheme, sounds and symbols your child is learning with.
- GOV.UK publishes guidance on phonics teaching in England, including the Department for Education's Reading Framework – search "phonics" or "reading framework" on gov.uk.
- The school's phonics information evening or parent handouts (often sent home at the start of Year 1) are a good place to check the specific terms your child's class uses.