Starting School
activities and ideas to help children get the best start at school!

Talking Matters
Speech Pathology
Helping your children reach their potential
www.talkingmatters.com.au
Ph 8255 7137
Starting right for school!

Starting school is a big and exciting step for our children, one that we as parents and educators hope will be a positive and rewarding one. The team of speech pathologists at Talking Matters work hard to help their families be as ready as they can for this important step, but we know that the most important people in young children’s lives are their parents! Parents of preschool children care the most, spend the most time and have the best relationships with their children. Therefore we know that helping caring parents to know how to help their children be ready for starting school is an extremely important part of our role in supporting families.

So we decided to put together this collection of information to provide to families free. These ideas are some of the ideas we share with families we are working with as they prepare to start school. This collection of information has been put together not just for the families we work with, but for all families who have children just starting, or about to start school. Giving children the best possible start to school is important to their overall success and feelings of self worth and we are keen for as many children as possible to have this opportunity, whether we work with them ourselves or not!

We also provide information on how to support children’s speech, language and literacy, amongst other topics on our webpage in the “plus” section. Anyone can register free to access this information by signing up on the webpage. Signing up not only gives you access to a large range of information and activities, but will register you for our free email newsletter. Our newsletter comes out about twice a term and it’s very easy to unsubscribe if you are no longer interested. For more free activities be sure to look at our website at www.talkingmatters.com.au and sign up for “Plus”.

At the end of this booklet you will find some information about dyslexia and some general information about how to tell if your child would benefit from specialist support. We encourage you to read this and refer to our website for more information if you have concerns. Speech pathologists are a good starting place if you have concerns about your child’s learning or reading. If in doubt an assessment can provide an overview of your child’s current abilities and highlight any areas of concern. For some families ongoing therapy isn’t needed and the speech pathologist can provide families with guidance and suggestions of things to do at home to help their child. At Talking Matters we have lots of different options for families to chose from. If you have concerns and would like an appointment with one of our team it’s easy to get started. You are able to make an appointment by phoning our office on Ph 8255 7137 and no doctor referral is necessary.

Talking Matters Team

Helping your child reach their potential
Hearing Beginning Sounds in Words

Before children are able to read and spell they must be able to hear the sounds in words and then be able to match them to the letters used to represent them. Children usually learn to hear the first sounds in words before any of the other sounds.

Here are some game ideas to help develop children’s ability to hear sounds at the beginnings of words. There is no magic trick to teaching children to hear sounds. They need lots of chances to listen hear and practice.

• Choose pairs of items that start with different sounds and place them in a bag. Choose carefully so that words start with a consonant and then a vowel (e.g. cat, dog, leg) and not with words that start with 2 consonants (e.g. frog, clock, snail). Take turns to remove items from the bag and attempt to collect the matching pair e.g. car-cat, dog-doll, goat-girl. The person with the most matching pairs is the winner.

• Play “I spy” e.g. [adult] “I spy, with my little eye, something that starts with a ‘c’. [child] cat! This is a great game to play in the car, turning a short drive to the shops into a mini practice session.

• Play the “Sound Bucket Game”. Use a bucket to collect as many things as you can that start with a chosen sound. For this game to be useful try to select a sound where you can see lots of easy to find items that will fit in the bucket. To modify this slightly you could play this packing up items at home. E.g. “let’s put all the things that start with a ‘b’ in the toy box first!”

• Play ball games either kicking, rolling, or throwing the ball and thinking of another word that starts with the special sound as you have your turn. To make it interesting, each player could have 3 lives and looses a life when he can’t think of a word with the right sound.

• Play memory with a difference. Make picture cards by cutting out pictures from magazines, or printing off the internet (talk about the beginning sounds as you do this together to). Find pairs that match because they have the same beginning sound.

• Make dominoes from pictures you find in magazines or on the internet. Instead of using matching number amounts to place next to each other, place together words that start with the same sound. For example ‘cat’ and ‘car’ would go next to each other because they both start with a ‘c’ sound.

• Play the attached shopping game. Go shopping for items that start with a chosen sound e.g. let’s buy all the things that start with a ‘m’ sound first, then we’ll buy the things that start with a ‘s’.
The Shopping Game

n

s
The Shopping Game
The Shopping Game

P

C
The Shopping Game
The Shopping Game
Hearing Syllables in Words

The ability to break a word into syllables enables a reader/speller to break bigger, unfamiliar words into smaller more manageable chunks. It is a phonological awareness skill that is expected to be present when children commence formal schooling. Research has convincingly demonstrated that phonological awareness is a powerful predictor of reading and spelling success in the early school years (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994)

The following games will help to develop skills in breaking words down into syllables:

**Make a word**
Write words with 2 syllables onto cards and cut them up into syllables. Place the cut up cards into a pack which is placed face down on the table. Players take turns to draw a syllable card from the pack. When they can make a word with the cards, this is placed face up on the table. When all the cards have been used, the player with the most words is the winner.

**Feely Bag**
Place a range of items (or pictures) or words with varying amounts of syllables into a bag. Have the child pull out one item at a time and either clap out, or tap out on the drums the number of syllables in the word.

**Clapping out words**
Clap out the names of people and items you can see around the room, words from a story book or words from flash cards.

**Syllable Lotto**
Make a set of Lotto cards each with six or eight different pictures of common objects whose names have one, two or three syllables. Make a pack of 24-36 cards with the numbers 1, 2 or 3. Provide each child with one Lotto card and six or eight counters or blank cards which can be used to cover their pictures. Read the number cards and if a child has a picture on their Lotto board with the same number of syllables, they can cover it with a counter or blank card. The winner is the first to cover all the pictures on their Lotto board.

**Happy Families**
Make a pack of picture cards consisting of cards which have one, two, three or four syllables. Shuffle the cards and deal out seven cards to each player placing the rest of the pack face down on the table. Players attempt to make a ‘set’ of four cards with the same number of syllables. The first player asks any other player for a picture which has the same number of syllables as one of their cards. The player continues to ask any player for cards until a player cannot provide such a card. The player then takes a card from the pack on the table and discards one from their hand. The turn then passes to the player on the right. As each player collects complete ‘set’ of four cards they are placed face down on the table in front of them. The player with the most ‘sets’ at the end of the game is the winner.
Multi syllable words
Multi syllable words
Hearing the Last Sound in Words

Before children are able to read and spell they must be able to hear the sounds in words and then be able to match them to the letters used to represent them.

Here are some game ideas to help develop children’s ability to hear sounds at the endings of words. There is no magic trick to teaching children to hear sounds. They need lots of chances to listen and hear, and even more chances to practice.

- Choose pairs of items that end with different sounds. Choose carefully so that words end with a vowel and a single final consonant (e.g. cat, dog, leg) and not with words that end with 2 consonants (e.g. nest, jump). Take turns to remove items from the bag and attempt to collect the matching pair e.g. cat-goat, bus-dress, pen-pin. The person with the most matching pairs is the winner.

- Play “I spy” e.g. [adult] “I spy, with my little eye, something that ends with a ‘c’. [child] truck! This is a great game to play in the car, turning a short drive to the shops into a mini therapy session.

- Play the “Sound Bucket Game”. Use a bucket to collect as many things as you can that end with a chosen sound. For this game to be useful try to select a sound where you can see lots of easy to find items that will fit in the bucket. To modify this slightly you could play this packing up items at home. E.g. “let’s put all the things that end with a ‘b’ in the toy box first!”

- Play ball games either kicking, rolling, or throwing the ball and thinking of another word that ends with the special sound as you have your turn. To make it interesting, each player could have 3 lives and loses a life when he can’t think of a word with the right sound.

- Play memory with a difference. Make picture cards by cutting out pictures from magazines, or printing off the internet (talk about the ending sounds as you do this together to). Find pairs that match because they have the same ending sound.

- When shopping talk about the ending sounds of all the groceries you buy.

- Play games in which you work out the ending sound. E.g. “let’s work out what the last sound is in all our friend’s names” “What is the last sound in the name Sam?”
Simple words for beginning and end sound sorting
Simple words for beginning and end sound sorting
Recognising Rhyming Words

Rhyming is a basic phonological awareness skill that assists children with learning to read and spell. When children are able to recognise and use rhyme their knowledge of words grows hugely. For example, if a child knows that ‘cat’ is spelled as such, and they can recognise the rhyme and change the beginning sounds, they are now able to spell the word ‘hat’. When reading they can recognise patterns in words and read new words because they are able to decode those patterns.

There are lots of ways to develop a child’s ability to hear and use rhyme. Children will be able to hear and recognise it first, and then learn to produce rhyme themselves later. Try these activities:

• Read books that emphasize rhyming words. Nursery rhymes and Dr Seuss books work well. Part the way through the book you may be able to stop before finishing the sentence and see if the child can guess the word. If they can’t guess you could always offer them a choice. E.g. Do you think ‘house’ sounds a bit the same as ‘boy’ or ‘mouse’?

• Make us ‘silly rhymes’ and feel free to make up words as well. For example, let’s make up words that rhyme with ‘crocodile’- “propodile, trocodile, golocodile”

• Throw a ball to the child making up rhyming words as you throw the ball back and forth e.g. (adult) mat (child) cat (adult) rat (child) sat etc.

• Provide children with tapes with rhyming poems, simple songs etc. with rhyme in to listen to. Listen with them and talk about the words that “sound a bit the same on the end”

• Recite rhymes or stories they know well that has rhyming words. Leave out the second rhyming word and have the child “help you” to finish it.

• Collect rhyming word pictures from magazines, or print them from the internet etc. Lay them all on the floor and then put them together in piles of words that rhyme.

• Make up your own story books at home using rhyming words e.g. The frog on the log was chased by a dog. Have the child draw the pictures with you and talk about all the words that rhyme.

• Sing ‘silly songs’ that rhyme with the child’s name e.g. Tommy, bo bommy, fo fommy, Tommy. Then have the child try it for other people’s names.

Always remember to keep it fun and don’t be frightened to get a little silly with it.
Rhyming words for games
Rhyming words for games
Rhyming words for games

Word sets

Cat, bat, mat, sat, rat, hat
Bear, pair, chair, hair
Plane, rain, train, pain
Cake, bake, rake, steak
Black, tack, snack, back pack
Bag, flag, tag, stag
Coat, goat, float, boat
Learning to listen

For a child to learn they must be able to attend to the sounds in their environment and learn from them. By improving children’s ability to listen to sounds and instructions, children will increase their learning and success in the classroom environment.

Activities to increase your child’s listening abilities:

1) **Play a listening game**, sit quietly in a room of your house and take turns identifying sounds you can hear e.g. taps dripping, creaking doors or ticking clocks.

2) **Make a scrap book**, or cut out pictures you find in a magazine, stick them into your scrap book and talk about the noise they make. Try and make the noises as you paste them into your scrap book.

3) **Play with toys**, and make their noises as you play with them. Encourage your child to listen and imitate the noises. As your child improves at this, hide a toy behind your back and make its noise, see if your child can identify what toy you are hiding and have them imitate the sound.

Everyday situations:

1) Take your child to the zoo, and talk about the animal noises as you wander around. Talk about all the different noises and what animals make that noise.

2) Listen for unusual sounds in the environment and encourage your child to point the sounds out to you e.g. how a coffee machine sounds, or a squeaky wheel on a trolley. Go for a walk through a park or reserve, talk about all the things you can hear e.g. birds, wind in the trees, planes or cars. Create a game and count how many things you can hear.

Listening to the difference between sounds:

Once your child is improving at identifying sounds in their environment, ask them to identify the differences in the sounds. Talk about the sounds being loud/quiet, high or low pitched.

1) As you walk around a shopping centre talk about the sounds you can hear, start introducing the concepts loud and quiet e.g. “can you hear the cars outside they sound quiet, but all these people’s voices together sound loud”.

2) Play a guessing game, ask your child to close their eyes while you make a sound and see if they can guess the sound. Once they have achieved this give them two sounds, and ask them to identify the sounds and what makes them different.
Learning to tell a story

Storytelling skills are important as stories form the link between the formal style of writing used in books and oral or spoken language. The more a child understands about how written language sounds and looks the easier it is for him or her to learn to read and write.

Most stories share a common structure and content.

- They have a beginning which usually has when, who and where parts. (One day (when) Goldilocks (who) went into the forest (where).)

- They have a series of actions. The story is about what happens to the characters. (She saw the house where the three bears lived and went inside.)

- They are told in past tense. (She ate the porridge and sat on the chairs.)

- The actions are linked with joining words which give information about how the parts of the story are related. (She lay in the bear's bed and fell asleep because she was so tired.)

- When a character speaks we need to be told who is talking. (“Who ate my porridge” said Baby Bear.)

- The story usually includes feelings (Baby bear was so sad that his chair was broken that he started to cry.)

- More complex stories also include thoughts, plans, problems and attempts to solve them, as well as descriptions of characters and settings.

- Stories have an ending that includes the problem being solved and a feeling. (Goldilocks was happy to be home and never went to the bear's house again.)

It is important for your child to develop ability to tell stories with the structure and content of written stories as this will assist in developing the ability to read and write. The more stories your child hears the more familiar this will be. Reading to children is the best way to prepare them to read and write.

Mem Fox suggests reading three books to children each day, one that is a favourite that your child wants to hear over and over, one that is familiar, that they have heard before, and one new one.

Libraries are a good source of new books and second hand shops can supply favourites to keep.
Learning to tell a story (continued)

Keep reading to your child when they start school. Children can’t read by themselves at the level of their understanding until they are around ten years old. Read them stories that are more complex than the ones they read themselves.

To develop your child’s ability to tell stories:
Choose a picture book with clear pictures that represent the story. Take time to talk to your child about what the story involves. Give your child time to think about these things before telling the story.

- Who are the characters?
- What is happening?
- Why is it happening?
- How are the characters feeling?

Tell the story to your child. You may choose to read the words or tell your own story. Try to include the story parts listed above.

Next encourage your child to tell the story from the pictures.

- Encourage them to begin with beginning information (when, where, who and what information)
- If they use present tense repeat this back as past tense eg “the boy is eating the apple” becomes “the boy ate the apple”.
- Help to tell the story using joining words to link actions if your child does not. “and then”.
- Help them to reference direct speech if they forget. eg: “said the boy”
- Encourage your child to finish the story with a good ending structure. eg: “they all lived happily ever after”

Ideas for Story Telling
1. Read stories to your child and ask him or her to tell them back from the pictures. These should be stories more complex than the ones your child reads.
2. Ask your child to re-tell the story of the latest book your child has read (or one that has been read to him or her).
3. Simply get your child to make up stories of his/her own.
4. Tell a story together. The parent or child can begin the story then each take it in turns to build up from there. More than one person can get involved (eg: mum, dad, brothers, sisters and friends)
5. Encourage your child to make up a play or TV presentation with other children. (They could even spend time making a TV set out of a huge cardboard box).
Developing attention skills

Children who have difficulty paying attention may miss large chunks of information or opportunities to learn skills which will impact on their learning. By developing your child’s ability to concentrate on activities for longer periods of time, you increase their ability to get the most out of their learning opportunities.

Children who find it difficult to attend and focus may benefit from the following strategies;

• When doing an activity choose seating positions carefully, to maximise access to the materials and minimise disruptions and distractions.
• Break instructions into smaller parts and give it in several forms (verbal, demonstration, diagrams and for children who can read as a written list to refer back to).
• Pair the child with a buddy who is quiet and focused and able to answer simple questions and gently keep the child on task.
• Give an early warning when planning to move from one activity or place to another. They will benefit from knowing they only have 5 minutes left.
• Give explicit time limits in a way the child understands. For example, for a younger child it might be, you are having your nap when this TV show finishes. For older children “you have 5 minutes to read the first 2 pages and answer the first 2 questions”.
• Help the child to prepare for activities well in advance.
• Praise your child’s efforts at maintaining their attention by “catching” them attending to what they are doing when it might be hard to concentrate, such as when there is extra noise.
• Encourage your child in physical activity as physical activity helps children to sustain their attention. Using something like a squeezing ball or rolling playdoh can be helpful for keeping them on task.
• Break up bigger tasks into small sections that the child can achieve and resume at a later time if necessary.
• During longer structured tasks provide short breaks that involve physical activity so they can refocus their attention again.
• Help your child to get started on activities, perhaps by putting the first couple of pieces in a puzzle, answering the first question or preparing the first part of a project.
Sharing books to develop literacy skills

Books introduce children to new worlds. When you read to your child, you are helping their mind grow and develop. You are also enjoying the chance to snuggle up and share the fun of reading together.

The best things about books
Book reading is a special time for you and your child. Books connect your child to the world- their world and new worlds. They transport your child to interesting places and situations, many of which your child has never seen.

One of the best things about books is that the pictures and words are always there to read again and again. Unlike speech which ‘disappears’ as soon as we finish talking, the stories and words in books come back to use the same way each time we read the book. This makes learning new words and ideas much easier for your child.

The earlier you begin to read and tell stories to your child, the sooner reading will becoming an important and enjoyable part of their life. Reading aloud to your child is the most important thing you can do to build the knowledge that your child needs to learn to read. Try to make reading part of every day. Take a book along with you wherever you go.

The right book for the right time
Children will enjoy and learn books in different ways at different ages.

• Babies believe books taste better than they look so cloth and cardboard books are the safest
• Toddlers like books that they can feel or smell or do things with such as flap books. They also like to name pictures of things that they know
• As your child gets older introduce simple action sequences and stories. Children like rhyme, rhythm and repetitive lines.

Turn book reading into a conversation
Allow your child to lead by taking the time to...

• Observe what your child does with the book
• Wait if your child wants to look at something
• Listen carefully to the sounds or words your child makes

Remember it is OK to
0 Just talk about the pictures
0 Change the words
0 Put your child’s name in the story
0 Focus just on a page that interests your child
0 Read a favourite book over and over again

This handout has been compiled using the Hanen books “It Takes Two to Talk” by Jan Pepper and Elaine Weitzman (2004), and “You Make the Difference In Helping Your Child Learn” by Ayala Manolson, Barbara Ward, and Nancy Dodington (2007).
Sharing books to develop literacy skills (continued)

Adapting to share with books means...
• Finding a comfortable place to read face to face, on the floor, on your lap, in a chair, at the table
• Imitate and interpret your child’s sounds and actions
• Take turns to share with your child

Adding new experiences and words means...
• Imitating and adding a word or action
• Making the words come to life by acting out
• Repeat, repeat, repeat
• Adding a new idea

Making your own books
Sometimes the books that children love the most are homemade books. A homemade book is extra special for your child because it can be all about them and because they can help you make it. This creates wonderful opportunities for your child to communicate and take turns with you. As you write the words beside the pictures, tell your child what you are writing. Better still, ask your child what they want you to write.

Ideas for homemade books :
• Picture books of things your child likes. You can use magazines, catalogues, drawings or clip art
• Photo albums of your child, special people and thing they have done
• Surprise books with flaps that open
• Your own stories about your child or yourself

Children love to have their books read over and over. You can get books at libraries, garage sales, second-hand book shops or from friends.

Reading with your child is something that you will both enjoy and that will help your child learn a great deal about the world. Try to read often and to read the same books many times. This gives your child a chance to learn from all the repetition. For a child, reading the same book again and again makes it feel like an old friend. This familiarity gives your child the confidence to try to express themselves. Reading the book with you creates a strong connection between books and being close to you – a connection that can help your child enjoy books for the rest of their life.

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What is dyslexia?

Children who are diagnosed as ‘dyslexic’ often don’t receive the speech pathology assistance that they need because many people in the community don’t yet know how a speech pathologist can help.

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that is thought to be based in the ‘wiring’ of the brain and is passed down in families. Children are often diagnosed as dyslexic if they are not fluent readers and spellers and yet appear to be of at least average intelligence, and their reading and writing difficulties cannot be explained by other learning difficulties or disability. Children who have not been properly taught to read, cannot be considered dyslexic.

Key points about Dyslexia

• The word “dyslexic” is used to describe children who are having difficulties learning to read.
• Dyslexia is most often a language based difficulty.
• Studies have shown from 5 to 10% of children have dyslexia.
• It interferes with understanding and learning to use language
• Difficulties are experienced with processing sounds in words, with reading, spelling and writing.
• A person who is dyslexic has difficulty with learning to read and spell that is not caused by
  + Hearing or vision impairments
  + Lack of or ineffective reading instruction
  + A general intellectual deficit.
Researchers have found that a gene on chromosome #6 is involved. This gene is dominant which is why it runs in families.

The assistance of a speech pathologist in assessing and working with dyslexic children is vital.

There is still much research needed in the area in order to gain clearer answers, but what we do know from the research is:

• Early intervention when children are experiencing difficulties with reading, spelling and writing, or have a family history of dyslexia is vital.
• Children need to have sound phonological awareness (hearing the sounds) before having phonics instruction (matching sounds to letter symbols).
• Children who are dyslexic require explicit phonological and phonemic awareness instruction, which is an area of speciality for speech pathologists.

What should you do?

If you have a family history of ‘Dyslexia’, help your child to start right by developing their phonological awareness. Talk to your Talking Matters Speech Pathologist about the programs such as “Ready to Read” and “Succeeding with reading” available from our office. Prevention is better than cure.

If your child is struggling with developing their reading, spelling or writing, seek professional support from your Talking Matters Speech Pathologist. Speech Pathologists are reading, spelling and writing experts.
How do I know if my child should see a professional?

The ideas we have provided in this booklet are a good place to start helping your child prepare for the first year of school. However, approximately 10% of children have language or learning difficulties and need more than this to realise their full potential. Time and time again research has shown that children who have extra needs get the most out of it when they are given help earlier.

Earlier support for children who need it means children benefit from

- Learning more quickly, as their brains are most ready to learn when they are younger
- Feeling better about themselves knowing you are there to help
- Reduced frustration and increased feelings of success
- Shorter times in therapy
- Better outcomes – early intervention helps children to reach their potential!

If your 4 1/2 to 6 year old has any of the difficulties listed below, a discussion and assessment with a speech pathologist would be a good investment in their future.

- Difficulty listening, or following instructions
- Difficulty in making their ideas and feelings understood
- Unclear speech, or difficulty saying any sounds (except /r/, /th/, or /v/ which may still be developing)
- Unable to tell you a story in a logical way that makes sense
- Difficulty answering day to day questions
- If they are struggling with learning to read or following the classroom routine
- If they find the activities in this book hard to do
About Talking Matters
Talking Matters is a private speech pathology clinic in Elizabeth East, which is in Adelaide’s northern suburbs. Our team of speech pathologists work alongside occupational therapists, psychologists, speech assistants and tutors to support children to develop their speech, language, learning and literacy skills. There are a wide range of services on offer to give families choices about the types of program that will work for their children.

We hope you and your children enjoy these activities. If you would like more information, our website has lots of free fun ideas and resources. If you would like our team to help you, it’s easy, just ring for an appointment. No referral is needed.

Services available to families:
• Individualised assessment and therapy
• Range of programs to suit families budgets
• Specialised reading instruction
• Coordinated speech, psychology and OT services
• Educational software your child will want to use
• Fun activities to support home practice
• Continuity from toddlerhood through schooling
• Practical professional training sessions for educators
• Access to useful information and activities for educators and families

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