



Episode 11 Turning *Little Stones* show notes
Sarah helps us understand how to make
phonics fabulous and fun.

Fabulous Phonics
with
Sarah Rowledge

In this podcast, Sarah tells us about her impressive career in Early Years, running her own nurseries, baby groups, primary school. She is a huge ambassador for helping us understand how children learn best. She now increasingly spends time supporting adults whether they are students, practitioners, or parents/carers.

The pressure of phonics

As children start primary school, 'phonics' is a word that is liberally used and so often misunderstood. Parents and carers often feel pressure to support their children learn 'phonic sounds'. Most carers of younger children want to 'teach' children phonics, believing they are preparing their children for school.

Sarah reminds us that children are innate communicators. In simple ways, carers can introduce our child(ren) to this wonderful world of sounds in fun, spontaneous ways. Even young children can have fun with sounds, and we can be confident that this is preparing them for later literacy.

At Turning Little Stones, we are about encouraging and inspiring carers and that means unpacking the jargon around Literacy & Phonetical Awareness!

What does Phonetical Awareness mean?

The term 'Phonics' refers to the *SOUND* of letters. This contrasts with the *NAME* of the letters.

The name of a letter refers to the alphabet *name* ABC

Each letter in the alphabet has a sound value which is far more useful for emergent readers and writers.

Of course, children have been absorbing sounds and words from birth. To learn to read and write, they also need to know phonic sound values – they are necessary building blocks on their literary journey.

CAUTION -there are many products available intended to help with phonics; but not all are helpful! Many have an American accent. Some are designed for children to use on their own; others may personify letter sounds... Choose with care!

'Sounds make SOUNDS

Mindful of these pitfalls, Sarah created an APP *A to Z Sounds make Sounds* which she developed in response to parents' anxieties and lack of confidence. She also noted the number of children attending nursery having learnt ABC (alphabet names). Similarly, nursery practitioners were not always confident and often reverted to very common mispronunciation of phonic sounds. She wanted to find a respectful way to assure and encourage *all* carers to correctly pronounce phonic sounds.

She explains that many of us will say the letter 'm' as a 'muh' sound. Sarah shows us how to eliminate the 'uh' so that we are left with the single sound mmmm.



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This simple, inexpensive non-gimmicky APP is designed to give carers confidence. It is designed to be shared with children, so that together adult and child can share sound discoveries. (It is identifiable on the APP store by its big orange zebra graphic).

Sounds make SOUNDS' - Chapter 1

Chapter 1 focusses on saying each sound correctly and then looking around for something that shares that first sound. Carers are not teaching; they simply share the fun of letter sounds and are often surprised by the discoveries their children make!

Some sounds are harder than others. Such as the letter sound b. It can take time for adults to practise shortening the 'uh' until it is barely noticeable – just a whisper after the 'b' sound. By focussing on the shortened phonic sounds, it is easier to hear sounds within words and later blend them. If a child has heard that a 'm' sound is 'muh', they will find it harder to blend it into a whole word (muh-a-t). If they know that its phonic sound is 'mm', they can gracefully blend it with other sounds (m-a-t) with much greater ease!

'Sounds make SOUNDS' - Chapter 2

The APP also showing the child how to form letters. Sarah explains that the font she uses (Rosemary Sassoon) is an aid to easily progress to joined up writing.

So many children who have learnt to form letters without such guidance have to 'unlearn' so much when at school.

It is well researched that children who have enjoyed mark making as young children (with sticks, mud, sand...) progress with greater ease when writing. Mark making develops fluid movements that supports the flow, skill, body movements and muscle development needed for writing. Mark making is also fun; joyful experiences which directly benefit their later learning, sitting at a desk in school.

Growing adult confidence

Sarah tells us of a parent who told a workshop her own journey into phonic awareness. The APP helped grow her confidence which translated to her son becoming "super-fascinated with all things literacy". He entered school, fluidly reading and writing. She recognised that the APP had given her the confidence she needed to support her child in readiness for his later learning.

For practitioners too, it can be embarrassing to admit or demonstrate to colleagues their uncertainty around phonics. Practitioners can practise at home and hold their head up high. Rather than avoid literacy, they know how to best support the children in their care.

Catching the moment!

Fabulous Phonics can be "super fun" when we *catch the moments*. When we feel pressure to teach phonics, the stress we experience impacts our children.



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Sarah shares some delightful examples on how opportunities for phonic awareness can be found in the ordinary. The joy of seeing a child who suddenly begins to blend sounds, hear sounds in words is magical... and... so much more effective and fun!

Some more takeaways....

Phonics is just one aspect of literacy and communication, which we will look at in 'Turning Little Stones' and 'Delving a Little Deeper'.

Other things to include (& the subject of later podcasts) are:

- Creating language-rich environments
- Adults who model reading and writing (especially male models)
- Let's not dumb down the words we use... young children LOVE long words.
- Rhythm and rhyme are also important, helping children find patterns in words and language

It's not about 'teaching' phonics, but more about catching and creating moments when we and our children can find the fun in Phonics.

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.