Sentences Are Made Up of Words

Your child is learning to break down short, spoken sentences into individual words. This is surprisingly difficult for young children, who organize language by meaning, not by individual words. For very young children, “I want my toy!” is one word, because it expresses one idea. Learning that words are the building blocks of sentences takes time and attention. These activities are useful ways to help your child notice the individual words used to make sentences.

Phonological awareness activities help children pay closer attention to the sounds of words. Learning how units of sound fit together into words is difficult for beginning readers. Please don’t feel these activities need to be enriched with printed letters or words. Right now, children should be concentrating on what they hear, not what they see.

Clapping Words

Choose a familiar nursery rhyme. As you say the rhyme with your child, clap once after each word. For example: “Twinkle” [clap], “twinkle” [clap], “little” [clap], “star” [clap]. Make sure your child is only clapping once per word, not per syllable.

Word People

This activity works best with 4–5 people. See if you can find additional family members or friends to help participate. Choose a sentence with 3–5 words and say it aloud, “I am happy.” Stand people in a row, one person per word. Have the first person say the first word. Continue down the row, each person saying one word. Mix everyone up in a different order and play again.

Repeat with more sentences. Try to use a variety of word sizes, some that are short and others that have three or more syllables.

Books to Read

Here are some books you may want to read together:

- *Barnyard Banter* by Denise Fleming
- *City Signs* by Zoran Milich
- *Epossumondas* by Coleen Salley
- *Hickory Dickory Dog* by Alison Murray
- *More More More Said the Baby* by Vera B. Williams
- *No!* by Marta Altes
- *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* by Rashin Kheiriyeh
- *Tikki Tikki Tembo* by Arlene Mosel
- *Wheels on the Bus (Raffi Songs to Read)* by Raffi and Sylvie Wickstrom