

By Car, Train, or Bus! The Sounds of Language On the Go

by Judith Fontana

Parents can help build language development in their children during "off moments" of the day, like when the family is traveling in the car or by bus. Moms, dads, or grandparents can play word games with kids to increase their letter and sound recognition.

The sounds of language are the building blocks of literacy. As you pull away in a car or bus, start a song or game that uses sounds. The trip will seem faster and your small passengers will be learning on the go! Here are some sound games to try:

1. Fill in the blanks

With preschoolers, sing or say Mother Goose favorites. Once your child is familiar with the nursery rhyme, let your child fill in the missing word as you pause at the end of the rhyme. Say something like:

*Jack and Jill went up the _____
to fetch a pail of _____*

2. Make it different

Older or more experienced children can play with sounds and words by altering familiar nursery rhymes. For example, here's a standard nursery rhyme:

*I never saw a purple cow
I never hope to see one,
But I can tell you anyhow
I'd rather see than be one.*

You and your child can change the rhyme so it becomes *I never saw a yellow horse* or *I never saw a green pig*. Encourage your child to use an adjective – a color, shape, or size – followed by a type of animal, the sillier the better.

3. Make your own tongue twister

You and your children can create your own variations of classic tongue twisters like *Peter Piper's Peppers*. Make up a new tongue twister, such as *Silly Sally's strawberries...*

4. Sound deletion games

Create new words together by dropping the first sound or consonant of a familiar word. For example, say something like:

"My word is *cat*. What is my word?" (*cat*)
Then say: "Take the /k/ off of *cat*. What do you have?" (*at*)
"Good, my word is *at*."

When doing such games, try to use familiar consonant-vowel-consonant words such as *cat*, *dog*, *fit*, *mix*, *fox*, or even words beginning with blends such as *truck*, *stick*, or *black*.

5. Sound substitution games

Another game to try involves sound substitution. Say something like the following:

"Add *p* to *at*. What do you have?" (*pat*)
"Good, change the *p* to *s*. What do you have?" (*sat*)

6. Blending games

When doing blending games, use words that are familiar to the child, such as his or her name. Say something like: "I am going to say a name very slowly. See if you can guess who I am thinking about." Then pronounce each phoneme of the child's name separately with about one second between sounds. "/p/ /a/ /t/"

If the child guesses his or her name, *Pat*, do the same thing with the names of other family members before switching to other familiar words. If the child does not recognize his or her name, repeat the phonemes a bit faster to approximate the blended word. Have the child repeat his or her name and also say it slowly in parts before moving on to other words.

7. Songs and stories on tape

If you're driving together in the car, play audiotapes of nursery rhymes, songs, or favorite story books. See the article [Using Audio Books to Create Readers](#) for additional ideas