Little Learners:
Phonics & Listening

Playful activities for listening, sounds, rhyme and early phonics



Ages 2–5

EYFS | SEND-inclusive

Welcome

For Practitioners

Thank you for using this pack to support children's early listening and speaking skills. The activities are designed to be playful, engaging and easy to use in your everyday setting.



What this pack supports

These playful activities help children develop:

- Early listening skills
- Awareness of environmental sounds
- Rhythm and beat
- Rhyme awareness
- Syllable (clap and count) awareness
- Initial sound recognition

How to use these activities

Use the activities through play, short sessions and everyday nursery routines.

- **Play:** Follow children's interests and let them lead.
- **Short:** Keep sessions brief – even a few minutes can make a big difference.
- **Everyday:** Try activities during snack time, tidy-up time, outdoors or while travelling.

Adult note

Children can respond in the way that works best for them:

Speaking | Pointing | Gesturing | Signing | Using AAC | Selecting pictures

There is no expectation to complete every page or follow a set order. Choose what suits your children and your setting best.

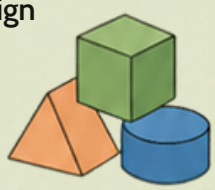
Practitioner guide



Children do not need to complete every page.
Children do not need to work in a fixed order.
Pick what is right for each child, on each day.

1. Learning areas

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design



2. Suggested materials

- Picture cards and symbols
- Drum or rhythm shaker
- Paper and crayons
- Everyday objects
- (e.g. spoons, cups, boxes)
- Soft toys or figures
- Fabric or scarves
- Choice board or visuals



3. Activity preparation

- Read the page and plan the activity.
- Choose 1-2 activities that fit your group or child.
- Gather materials in advance.
- Set up a calm and familiar space.
- Show the activity first.
- Offer clear, simple choices.
- Keep activities short and flexible.



4. Tips for adapting activities (SEND-inclusive)

- Offer two-choice versions first.
- Use familiar, concrete objects.
- Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC and picture selection.
- Never require eye contact, spoken answers or stillness.
- Offer quiet or picture-based alternatives.
- Avoid unexpected loud noises.
- Respect existing support plans and strategies.



Listening detective

Invite the child to notice the sounds around them. They can listen in any way that feels good for them.





bell



keys



door



rain



footsteps

What did the child notice?

Record sounds, gestures, points or other responses.

Picture-based or quiet alternative

Offer the child a choice of sound pictures or objects to explore. They can point, touch, look, move toward, or show any other way of communicating.
Quiet time is always okay.



NurseriesAndSchools.org
• Explore • Empower • Decide

Match the sound to the picture

Name or play one sound at a time.
Invite your child to match it to the picture.
Pointing, eye gaze, gestures or AAC are all valid!

SOUNDS	PICTURES
	
	
	
	



QUIET OPTION

You can name the sounds quietly instead of using a recording.

Loud or quiet?

Look at the pictures.
Sort them under ‘quiet’ or ‘loud’.
You can choose the picture that feels right to you.

quiet	loud







Some children experience sounds differently. You can choose not to take part in sounds that feel uncomfortable. Use the picture cards or pretend play instead.

Animal sounds

NurseriesAndSchools.org
• Explore • Empower • Decide

Let's match each animal to its sound.

Adults: read the animal and sound words.

Support children to connect the correct pairs.

Children may point, gesture, sign, use AAC or select pictures.

Which animal?		What sound?
 Cow	●	● Quack!
 Duck	●	● Meow!
 Dog	●	● Baa!
 Cat	●	● Woof!
 Sheep	●	● Moo!

Who makes this sound?



Listen to the sound clue.

Which picture makes this sound?

Choose the best answer.

1

I bark.





2

I go moo.





3

Tweet, tweet!





4

Beep, beep!





Children can answer by pointing, eye gaze, gestures, AAC or selecting a picture.



Everyday sounds



Name or make one sound at a time.
Invite the child to match it
to the picture on the right.

Sound	Picture
	
	
	
	
	

Quiet picture-only alternative

Use this version for a quiet activity. Point to or name a picture and talk about the sound it makes.



Sound bingo

Listen carefully and find the sound!

How to play

- Name or play one sound at a time.
- Children find or cover the matching picture.
- Children may point, gesture, use AAC or choose a picture-only version.

BINGO BOARD



MATCHING TOKENS – CUT OUT



Outdoor sound hunt



Go outside and listen carefully.
Point to the pictures or mark what you hear.

☐		**Birds**	
☐		**Wind**	
☐		**Leaves**	
☐		**Footsteps**	
☐		**Vehicles**	
☐		**Rain**	

Indoor alternative

Listen inside instead. What can you hear?

Talking	Clock ticking	Fridge	Running water	Door closing	TV or music
					
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



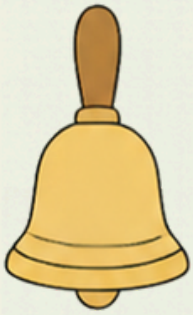
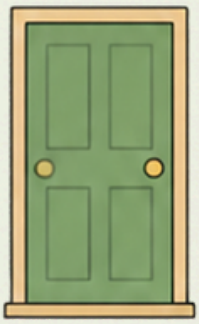
Accessibility note

You can use pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or picture selection.
You do not need to make or tolerate uncomfortable sounds.



Sound detective cards

Cut out the cards and listen for the sounds.

 bell	 keys	 rain	 dog	 footsteps
 car	 door	 bird	 drum	 telephone

Adult note

These cards can be named, matched, sorted or used without playing the sound.

What is a rhyme?

Rhyming words sound alike at the end.
Say the words aloud and listen carefully.



cat / hat





dog / log





sun /



fun



Listen, notice and join in however you like.

You can say the words, make the sounds, clap, move or smile!

SEND-inclusive:
Pointing, gestures, signs, AAC and picture selection are all great ways to respond.





Match the rhyming pictures

Say each word out loud.
Match the pictures that rhyme.
You can draw a line or place a token.













Which word sounds different?

Adult: Say each word.
Which one sounds different?

1





2





3





Adult Answer Key

1 cat 2 cat 3 dog

Clap the syllables

Say each word. Clap, tap, drum or move to the beats in the word.



cat

Syllables 1



apple

Syllables 2



banana

Syllables 3



dinosaur

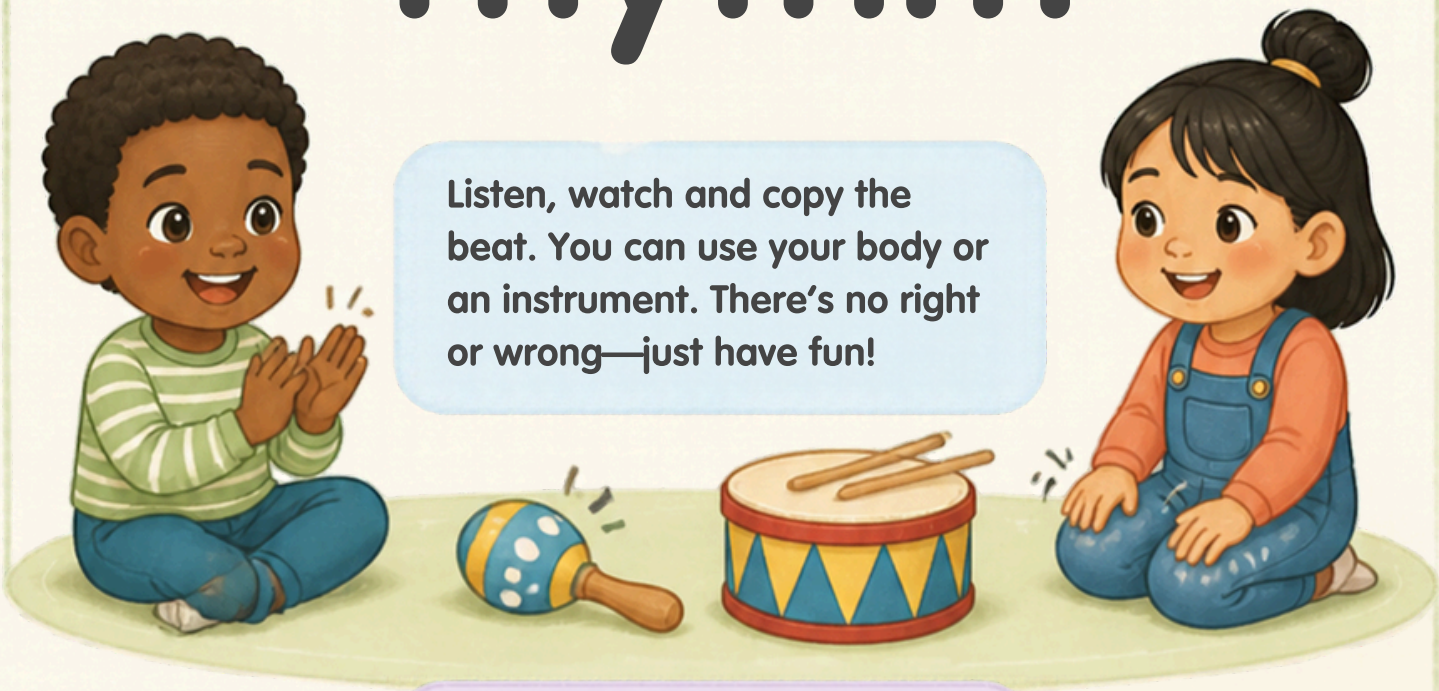
Syllables 3



Children can clap, tap, move, point or use another preferred response.



Beat the rhythm



Listen, watch and copy the beat. You can use your body or an instrument. There's no right or wrong—just have fun!

Try these patterns



Pattern 1

Clap - Tap - Clap - Tap



Pattern 2

Drum - Pause - Drum - Pause



Pattern 3

Shake - Clap - Shake - Clap

Quiet option



Use the picture cards to follow the patterns or tap the beat silently on your knees. You can also create your own pattern and invite someone to copy you!

Nursery rhyme prompts

Look, sing and join in with familiar nursery rhymes.



Twinkle, twinkle



Incy wincy spider



Baa, baa



Wheels on the bus

Adult guidance: Sing or recite the rhyme theme shown above. Encourage children to join in by: speaking, humming, moving, pointing, signing, using AAC or simply listening.

Children may choose a quiet or picture-only version.

What is a beginning sound?

Every word begins with a sound.
We can listen for that first sound.



Say: apple.
The first sound
is /a/.



Say: bear.
The first sound
is /b/.



Say: cat.
The first sound
is /c/.

For adults: How to try it

1. Say the word naturally.
2. Gently stretch or repeat the first sound
   Example: apple... /a/
3. Invite your child to notice or choose
   the picture that begins with that sound.



All ways to respond are OK!
Children may respond by speaking, pointing, gesturing, signing, using AAC, selecting pictures or simply listening.



Find the pictures beginning with /s/

Say each word aloud.
Listen for the /s/ sound at the beginning.



sun



sock



snake



star



ball



dog

Adult guidance: Say each word clearly.
Model the /s/ sound gently (sss).
Children can respond by pointing, looking, using gestures, AAC or selecting the pictures.

Children may choose a quiet or picture-only version.

Meet the /m/ sound

These words all start with the /m/ sound.



moon



mouse



milk



muffin

Adult guidance: Say each word naturally and notice the beginning /m/ sound together. There is no need to name the letter.

Children may point, gesture, sign, use AAC, select pictures or listen.

Sort by beginning sound

Listen to the first sound. Place each picture in the correct mat.

s



m



Adult guidance: Say the sound gently and clearly. For example, “ssss... sun” and “mmmm... mouse.” Pause and wait. Praise any response. Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or picture selection.

Which picture starts differently?

Say the words aloud. Choose the picture that starts with a different sound.


sun


sock


dog


moon


mouse


sun


star


snake



milk

Adult guidance: Say each word clearly. Give your child time to choose the picture that starts differently.

Answer key:
1. dog
2. sun
3. milk

Initial-sound picture cards

Focus on /s/ and /m/.



sun



sock



snake



star



moon



mouse



milk



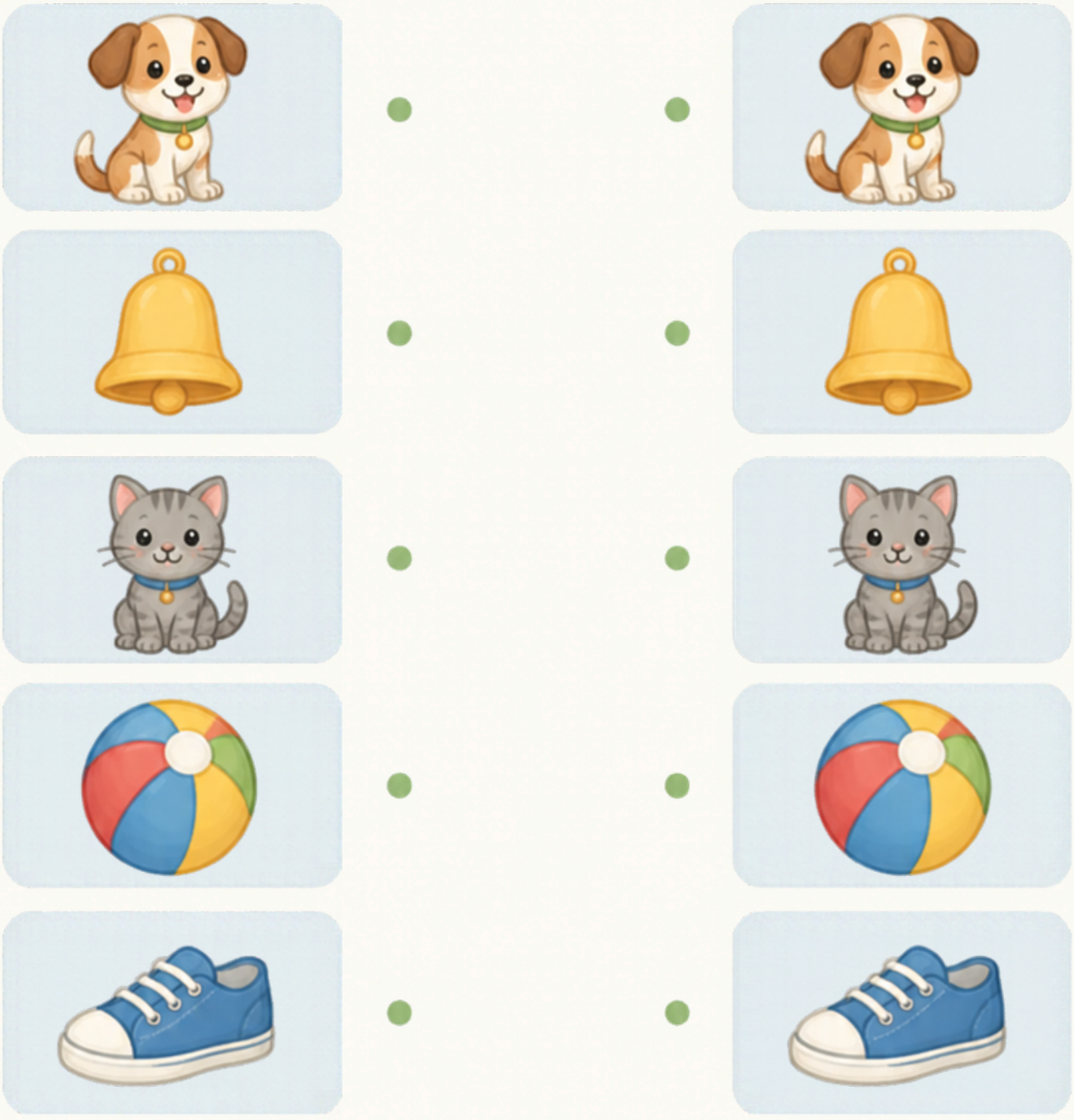
muffin

Adult guidance: Use these cards for sound exploration, sorting, matching or choosing.
Children do not need to read—focus on the first sound.

Quiet picture-only option: Use the cards without words.
Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or picture selection.

Match the picture pairs

Find and match the same pictures.



Adult guidance: Invite your child to match the same pictures. They can draw lines, place tokens, point, use eye gaze, gestures, signs or AAC.

Sound sorting mats

Animal sounds

Listen to a sound. Place or choose the matching picture.

Everyday sounds

Listen to a sound. Place or choose the matching picture.

Adult guidance

Name or play a sound. Invite the child to place or choose the matching picture.



Quiet picture-only option

Use the mats without words. Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or eye gaze.



Listen and point

Listen to the word.
Can you point to the right picture?



Can you find the dog?



Can you point to the bell?



Can you find the rain?



Can you point to the bird?



Can you find the car?



Can you point to the drum?

Adult note: Say one prompt at a time. Allow plenty of time to respond. Offer breaks and repeat as needed.

Any response is great: pointing, eye gaze, gestures, signing, AAC or selecting a picture.



Quiet picture-only option: Use these pictures without words. Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or picture selection.

What comes next?

Look at each pattern. What comes next?
Choose or place the picture in the empty box.

1.


clap


tap


clap


tap

2.


drum


pause


drum

3.


bell


rain


bell


rain

4.











Adult answer guide

The next item in each pattern is:

- clap
- pause
- bell
- star



Ways to play

Copy the patterns with your hands or body.

Point, move, tap or use tokens to show what comes next.

Explore your own patterns—there is no wrong way!

Use the picture cards without words.
Accept pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or picture selection.

Cut-and-match phonics activity

Say each word naturally.
Place each picture under the sound it begins with.

/s/	/m/


sun


sock


snake


star


moon


mouse



milk


muffin

Adult guidance: Say each word naturally and invite your child to place it under the sound it begins with.

All communication is welcome: Children may point, gesture, use AAC or select pictures instead of speaking.

My favourite sounds

Show or tell which sounds you like, are not sure about, or do not like.

A sound I like	A sound I am not sure about	A sound I do not like

You can choose a picture or draw your own


cat


bird


rain


bell


vacuum cleaner


drum

Another picture or drawing

How you can tell us

Pointing, choosing a picture, gestures, signing, AAC, drawing or speaking—whatever works best for you.

Adult note

Never require a child to listen to or make a sound that feels uncomfortable. Always offer a quiet or picture-based alternative.

Blank sound cards

Cut out the cards and add your own pictures.

Adult note – How to use



Sound matching

Add pictures of sounds to match to items, words or objects.



Sorting & choice

Sort by likes, not sure, or not likes. Use for choices and preference boards.



Quiet use option

Offer the cards silently. Let the child point, use signs, AAC or choose a picture to show their thoughts.

For children who communicate by pointing, gestures, signs, AAC or selecting pictures.

My own matching board



Add your own photographs, drawings or picture symbols to create a matching activity.

Invite your child to match, point, place or choose.

My matching board

My tokens

How you can tell us

Responses can be made through pointing, eye gaze, gestures, signing, AAC or speech—whatever works best for you.



Adapt the activity

Make it easier



familiar objects



adult modelling



picture-only versions



repetition



extra processing time

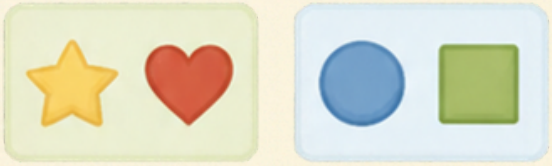


breaks

Extend the activity



new vocabulary



sorting by features



copying a rhythm



noticing initial sounds

Follow the child's communication style and existing support plan.
Never require eye contact, speech or stillness.
Never require uncomfortable sounds.



Individual observation record

Record observations without comparing children with one another.

Date

Activity

What the child noticed

How the child communicated

Communication may include speaking, pointing, gestures, signing, AAC, eye gaze, movement or selecting pictures.

What support helped

Possible next steps

This record reflects the child's unique experiences and interests in this moment.

Home-nursery sound hunt

Look, listen or notice together.

Point, draw or add a home-language word.

You decide what you hear.

door



kettle



water



birds



vehicles



footsteps



rain



Our favourite sound

Draw a picture, add a word or write your home-language word.

Quiet choice

Use pictures, drawing, signs, or AAC—whatever works best.



Always safe

No child has to listen to a sound that feels uncomfortable.



Practitioner quick reference guide



Simple, practical reminders to help you use this pack in a playful, supportive and inclusive way.

1. How to use this pack

- Start with two choices.
- Use familiar objects and pictures.
- Accept all communication methods.
- Avoid time pressure.
- Avoid unexpected loud sounds.
- Respect individual sensory preferences.
- Follow existing support plans.
- Use activities playfully, not as tests.



2. Adapting for SEND

- Reduce choices, then build up.
- Offer visual supports and symbols.
- Allow extra processing time.
- Use simple, clear language.
- Offer movement and fidget options.
- Allow alternative ways to respond (AAC, gestures, pointing, looking, drawing, sounds).
- Modify materials or space to red barriers.



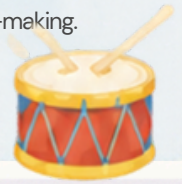
3. Breaks & quiet alternatives

- Offer regular movement breaks.
- Provide a calm, quiet space.
- Offer noise-cancelling headphones if helpful.
- Suggest quiet choices when overwhelmed (e.g., look at a book, squeeze a soft object, draw).
- Let the child choose the quiet option.



4. Build listening and sound play into daily routines

- Use songs for transitions.
- Notice and name everyday sounds.
- Play "I spy a sound" on walks.
- Include rhythm in stories and play.
- Encourage turn-taking in stories, and Celebrate any listening and sound-making.



Adult preparation & follow-up checklist

- [ ] I have offered two choices or a clear option.
- [ ] I have used familiar objects and pictures when possible.
- [ ] I have accepted all communication methods.
- [ ] I have avoided time pressure and unexpected loud sounds.
- [ ] I have respected individual sensory preferences and support plans.
- [ ] I have kept activities playful, not as tests.
- [ ] I have kept activities playful, not as tests.
- [ ] I will share key observations with my team and family.

