

Ways to help

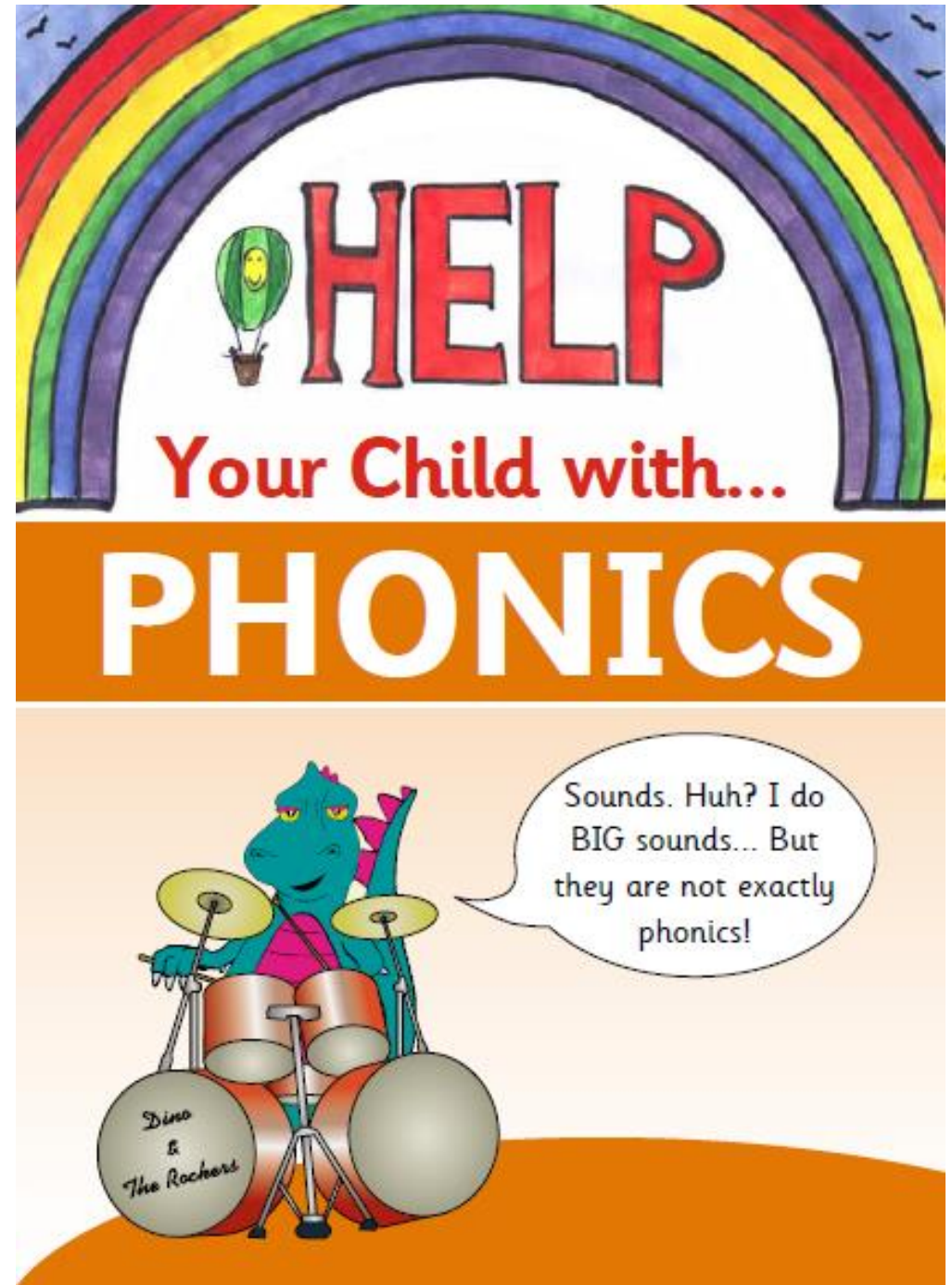
At the start of learning to read, some simple phonics can really make a lot of difference. Here are some ways to help...

First Sounds! Encourage your child to listen for the first sound in a word. E.g. the /sh/ sound in 'ship' or 'shark' or the /d/ sound at the start of 'dog'. Help children to spot words starting with the same sound as their name. Amy can spot 'apron' and 'April' but not 'apple'! They may also recognise 'their' letter, but get them to listen out for the sound.

Rhyming games. Help children listen out for middle and end sounds in words by asking them to spot and create rhymes. Best, guest, west, VEST ... can be part of a game where you take turns to say a rhyming word. The words do not have to be 'real' – ants, lants, fants, PANTS... cause great giggles!

Sounding out to read and write. Help your child to sound out simple words. Words like 'this', 'that', 'thing' and 'then' are best read by sounding each phoneme: /th/ - /a/ - /t/. This really helps children to read small common words like 'in', 'an', 'on', 'at', 'it', 'is', 'up', 'us', 'we', etc.

Try to read for a few minutes every day!



Simple advice on helping a child with phonics...

Phonics are special sounds: The sounds which make up 'talk'. Children progress naturally from talking to writing, and from listening to reading. We need to encourage this process!

Phonemes: When we speak, we make sounds. These sounds form words and phrases. These sounds are 'phonemes'. Take the sound 'shhh'. (Make it by putting your finger on your lips as if you were telling someone to be quiet!) This is a phoneme because it forms part of the words 'shark', 'flash', 'nation', 'ambition' and many others. But the sound you make when clapping your hands is not a phoneme as a hand-clap sound is not part of any words!

How many phonemes: There are generally reckoned to be around 44 different phonemes or sounds that make up spoken English. This will vary from area to area as different accents use different sounds.

What about letters: Letters are graphemes - ways of writing down the sounds that come out of our mouth. We use the term 'grapheme' rather than letter because many sounds are written using more than one letter. E.g. the 'shhhh' sound is often written using the letters s and h as in 'shark' or it is written using the letters 'ti' as in 'nation'. The grapheme representing this sound here is 'ti'. One sound can be written in different ways and often using two (or more) letters.

Learning Phonics

Children need to learn three things:

1. The words that we SAY can be broken up into single sounds (phonemes). 'c' 'a' 't' is cat.
2. Written script is a code - we learn how to write each sound we hear in a word. When we read, one of the things we do is to 'decode' the words.
3. Any one sound can be written in more than one way!

Distinguishing letters and sounds: It really helps to make a distinction between letters and sounds. Letters allow us to write sounds down. So Cecily's letter is C, but her sound is /ssss/. Cecily has to see that 'her' sound is sometimes written with a 'c', as at the start of her name and in words like 'ceiling', but that it is more often written 's', as in 'snake'. Even if your child's name starts with a sound written in a common way, e.g. Timmy, where the /t/ sound is written with the letter 'T', it is still important that they realise that this is not always so. When Timmy meets the word 'this', he sees that 'his letter' does not make the /t/ sound here - it is part of a grapheme, 'the' which makes a different sound, /th/.

