

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

Alpha Fun

 *Letters and Spelling*

Preschoolers can recognize and identify letters—especially familiar letters like those in their names. When you join your child in his play with alphabet toys, you encourage his interest in learning.

What is the practice?

Playing, talking, and asking questions as your child enjoys alphabet toys makes letter learning fun and exciting. Letter blocks, magnetic letters, and alphabet puzzles are the kinds of toys that can spark parent-child talks about letters. They let children become familiar with the ABCs. Such toys also help preschoolers begin to form words without the added pressure of writing.



What does the practice look like?

Let your child play with letter-shaped cookie cutters in corn-meal, play dough, or real biscuit dough. Cut letter shapes from sponges for her to play with in the bathtub. Use them as stamps to make designs with washable paint. Talk to her about what she's doing as she plays. As your child lines up magnetic letters on the refrigerator door, stacks alphabet blocks, or strings alphabet beads, talk with her about what she is doing. Encourage her interest and curiosity about letter sounds.

How do you do the practice?

When your child plays with alphabet toys, add to the fun by having lots of them. Praise his efforts and follow his lead.

- Let your child tell you the letters in his name using blocks, stamps, or other toys that have those letters. Show him how to use them to form his name. Help him discover that even though letters may be different colors or sizes on different toys, their names stay the same.
- Show your child how the letters on her alphabet toys are paired with sounds. For example, when your child hands you the block with *T* on it, name the letter and its sound. Together try to think of words that start with the *Ttt* sound.
- Try to avoid making alphabet toys seem too “hard” or too much like work. Most preschoolers are beginning to understand that we use letters to make words. But they might be unsure about their exact sounds and shapes. Show interest and pleasure in his attempts at learning through play. That is more important than expecting him to remember all the letters right away.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child play eagerly with alphabet toys?
- Does your child point out familiar letters on his toys and other places he sees them?
- Does your child name sounds and letters when you are playing with alphabet toys together?

Take a look at more fun with alphabet toys

Singing to Remember

Three-year-old Jake brings an ABC puzzle to his mom at the kitchen table. "I need help," he says. "Let's take a look," his mom responds. She helps Jake tip the brightly colored foam pieces out onto the table. "Where should we start?" his mom asks. Jake picks up the purple J. "You found your letter," his mom says. "J is for...?" "Jake," Jake finishes, and he fits the piece into the right spot. He places a few more letters correctly based on their colors and shapes. Then Jake pauses. "What's the first letter?" his mom asks. "Should we sing *The Alphabet Song* and figure it out?" They use the song to place the A. Jake's mom helps him return to the song each time he gets confused about where the pieces go.



Magnetic Grocery List

Four-year-old Sam likes playing with the colorful magnets his mom got him. There are numbers, letters, and basic shapes in the set. Sam loves moving them around on the refrigerator door. When his mom runs out of things she needs to buy at the store, she asks Sam to use his magnets to "write" a reminder. "We're all out of milk, Sam," his mom says. "Can you put that on the refrigerator with your letters so we remember to get more?" Sam can hear the first *Mmm* sound in the word. With Mom's help, he figures out other letters to use. Sam likes this important family job. Before each shopping trip, he reads back the list to make sure they don't forget anything.



Stringing Along

Jordan, who is 4 years old and deaf since birth, is stringing large plastic beads with her dad. The beads are different colors and have letters printed on their sides. Jordan shows her dad the beads she has strung on a cord, signing the colors and letter names. "That's right," her dad says, speaking and signing. "And what's this one?" He points to a letter A on her cord. Jordan signs the letter A. "That's right, that's A," Dad signs. "What words start with the letter A?" They take turns signing *apple*, *arm*, and *ant*. "We can make those words," Jordan signs. Together they sort through the beads for more letters they can add to the cord to form words.

