

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

Alphabet Block Play

Alphabet Exposure

Before young children reach an age when they can say their ABCs, adults can help them become familiar with letters. There are many opportunities for them to play with different kinds of alphabet toys that help them do this. This practice guide includes ideas for helping parents introduce ABC play materials to their infants.

What is the practice?

This practice involves the use of alphabet blocks that make noise when shaken or squeezed and other kinds of alphabet blocks that provide some kind of feedback when an infant plays with them. Playing with the blocks introduces a baby to the ABCs.

What does the practice look like?

Once an infant learns to shake rattles, swipe at mobiles, bang a toy on a highchair tray, and otherwise make interesting and fun things happen, she can benefit from alphabet toys. Many kinds of store-bought and homemade alphabet toys can be used by the child to make noises or produce interesting feedback. Search the Web using **infant alphabet blocks** for ideas about the great variety of alphabet toys for infants. Remember that the best ABC blocks need to provide some type of feedback when the baby plays with them. You can even show parents how to create homemade alphabet toys using small, clean, plastic containers. Boxes, spice bottles, baby food jars, etc. are great materials to use. Gather the containers and fill each one with a different noisemaker. Try dried lentils, rice, marbles, or tiny jingle bells, just to name a few. Carefully and thoroughly seal the openings to make them “baby-proof.” Then print a different alphabet letter on each side with bright, nontoxic markers or paint.



How do you do the practice?

If a child in your care likes banging, shaking, making noise, and seeing interesting things happen, she will easily figure out how to have fun with ABC blocks and toys. Here are some ideas you can use to introduce letter recognition into block play:

- Pick a few words with which the child is familiar (her name, Mommy, Daddy, doggy, kitty, etc.). While she is playing with the blocks, point out those with the initial letters of familiar names. For instance, say, “Look! Here is a B. B for Barbara.” Introduce other letters and their sounds into the block play by making similar comments.
- Use simple word games or ABC songs while playing with the child (“A is for Apple, B is for Boy, C is for Cat”). Introduce letters and words only as long as the activity holds the baby’s attention. The next time you play together with the alphabet blocks, repeat the same letters and words. Hearing them over and over will help her recognize them.
- Blocks that have pictures or images of the child’s favorite things along with the first letter of their names will also help with letter recognition.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child like using the blocks to make different sounds?
- Does the child try to imitate or make sounds that are like the letters she hears you say?
- Does the child play with alphabet toys?

Take a look at more fun with ABC blocks & toys

Give-and-Take with ABC Toys

Olivia is 10 months old and loves to squeeze things! She babbles excitedly when she gets to handle things that are soft, squishy, and squeaky. Olivia has figured out how to squeeze the toys to make sounds. Olivia's mom has found a set of soft ABC blocks with pictures of the first letter of different animal names. One day when their home visitor, Chris, is there, Olivia's mom brings out the blocks as part of a give-and-take game they often play with toys. Mom shows her daughter the new blocks, and Olivia immediately responds by reaching for them and babbling and chuckling. As Olivia touches each one, Chris names the animals pictured on its sides. He points to and says the first letter of the animal name. "Look! It's a bear. Bear starts with a B." Mom takes over, finding one of Olivia's favorite animals on a block and presenting it next. "Here's a pretty kitten! Kitten starts with this letter, K."



Shake, Rattle, and Roll

Nine-month-old David and his big brother, Nathan, are playing with toys that make funny sounds when shaken. David's home visitor comments, "It looks like David loves to shake, rattle, and roll." He suggests that Nathan hand the noisemaking blocks one at a time to baby David and chant: "Shake, Rattle, and Roll, David puts the (letter name) block into the bowl!" Nathan hands a block to David and recites the rhyme. Each time David drops an ABC block into a container it makes a satisfying noise and everyone claps and cheers for him. David is delighted. He shows he wants to play some more by holding his hand out to Nathan or his home visitor and babbling with excitement. They hand him another letter block and the game continues.

Braille Blocks

Erik's mother has found a fun way to introduce the ABCs to her 15-month-old son, who has a visual impairment. Erik's early interventionist, Jayne, gave them a set of Braille alphabet blocks. Mom used them to make up an animal sound game that Erik loves to play. Each of the blocks has a picture of an animal along with the first letter of each animal's name embossed in Braille. Mom hands a block to Erik and names the animal and letter on it. Then Mom and Jayne take turns imitating the sound that animal makes. Erik loves to hear the funny animal sounds and delights in getting his mom to make them.

