

Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers! 

Fun With Letters

Alphabet Knowledge

Preschoolers are eager to recognize some letters, especially those in their names. Often they can even point out the letters in an array of contexts. Reinforce these skills by giving children chances to interact with letters that appeal to the senses. Stock your classroom with many different alphabet toys. Make or purchase letter sets with lots of textures, colors, and sizes. Include alphabet toys that make sounds. Try toys that “speak” the name of a letter when a letter-shaped button is pushed. Alphabet toys promote future reading and writing by making the ways letters look and sound part of children’s everyday experiences.

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes ways to use alphabet toys and materials to provide a literacy-rich environment for preschoolers. Relate to students positively and let children be active as they engage with these toys. It will increase their familiarity, interest, and comfort with how letters look and function.



What does the practice look like?

Children can move plastic letters on a magnet board and build with letter blocks. They can solve alphabet puzzles or use stamps and sponge-paint with letters. These activities will help the children in your care become familiar with letters. Talking with adults about what the letters look and sound like strengthens these concepts for preschool students. Point out things that are the same between letters on toys and printed materials such as signs, books, and posters. This helps promote preschool children’s interest and understanding. During free play time, encourage the children in your classroom to play with alphabet toys. Respond enthusiastically to the children’s curiosity about the letters and the things they do with them.

How do you do the practice?

There are many ways teachers can enhance the alphabet awareness of preschool children. Provide them with attractive, developmentally appropriate alphabet toys and encourage the children to explore and experiment with them. Put alphabet blocks in the blocks center. Add letter magnets, stamps, and sponges to the art center. Include choices of alphabet puzzles and beads in the manipulatives center. Add letter-shaped cookie cutters or sand molds to the play table. These are just some of the ways children can begin to become familiar with the look of letters.

- While children play with alphabet blocks or work a letter puzzle, support them in finding the letters in their names. Ask them to match letters and point out the differences. For instance, explain, “This block has a red R, but the R is blue on this one.”
- Help older preschoolers begin to use magnetic and other tactile letters to “write” a message and play with words. It is okay if the words are not spelled perfectly. The idea is to show how letters make words you can read. Joining letters can be a less complex task and therefore more immediately rewarding for some children than trying to write.
- Support preschool children’s play with alphabet toys. Make it fun rather than making it too “academic.” The children will continue to want to explore with these letter-learning activities if they are having fun.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children in your class starting to point out letters of the alphabet?
- Do the children show interest in alphabet toys?
- Do the children seem to enjoy naming letters?

Take a look at more fun with the alphabet

Easel Ease

Ms. Miller, a teacher in a preschool class of 4-year-olds, walks over to a small group of children. She carries a box of brightly colored magnetic letters and a small magnetic easel. "What are these?" one child asks. "Letters!" a second child answers. "Look, this is my letter." "Where's my letter?" Other children crowd around to look at them. "Look at what they can do," Ms. Miller says, spreading the letters out among the children. "See what happens when you put them on the easel." The children experiment with sticking the letters to the magnetic surface and making their names. Ms. Miller guides her preschool students' play. She helps them think about the sounds of the letters and supports their attempts to make words.



Greeting Cards

Mr. Lee provides a small group of children in his preschool class with colored paper and alphabet stamps and stickers. "We're going to make cards with these," he explains. "You can use the stamps and stickers to write a message. You can write to your mom or dad, your friend, or anyone else to whom you want to send a card. You can also use them to decorate your message." The children gather their supplies and plan their cards. "I need *M* to write *Mommy*," one child says. "That's right," Mr. Lee answers, passing her the *M* stamp. "What other letters are you going to use for *Mommy*?" "I use *E*, because it sounds like eeee," a second child says. "Where's the *E*?" The children help each other find letters and create their cards.

Comparing Letter Shapes

In an inclusive class of 4-year-olds, Ms. Sawyer brings a set of alphabet cookie cutters to the table. Some of her children, including Lily, who has visual impairments, are rolling out play dough. She shows the children the cutters, and places Lily's hands in the box so she can pick a letter, too. "Look," a child says, pressing his *M* into the dough and holding up the letter shape. "Great," Ms. Sawyer responds, "What did you make?" "He made *M*," another child responds, and presses her letter too. "Can you show Lily your *M*?" Ms. Sawyer asks. The child places the *M* shape on the table and helps Lily find and touch it. She traces it with her hands. "Is that letter on the table the same shape as the cookie cutter you're holding?" Ms. Sawyer asks, encouraging Lily to trace her *B* cookie cutter. "No, it's not the same," Lily answers, pressing her letter into the play dough. "This is how my letter feels."

