

Sounds of Letters

Alphabet Knowledge

Before preschoolers begin to read or spell, they must learn the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent. Learning to pair letters and sounds helps prepare preschool children for later reading.

What is the practice?

You can help preschool students in your class become familiar with letters and their sounds during everyday play and activities. Use books, toys, environmental print, and games to show the link between printed letters and their sounds.

What does the practice look like?

A preschool child may recognize the first letter of his name, "his letter," on a poster. A group of children can use magnetic letters to sound out and form words. A teacher reads an alphabet book at group time. All of these are examples of everyday opportunities that focus preschool children's attention on letters and letter sounds.

How do you do the practice?

Introducing letter names and sounds can happen as part of planned and informal activities during your daily routine.

- Start with your children's special interests. Suppose they love trucks. When sharing a truck book, point out the initial letter of a truck's name and talk about the letter sound. If they notice a new sign in the hallway, talk about the letters and words and what they mean.
- Provide a variety of alphabet toys in each classroom center. Include items like letter shaped rubber stamps, magnetic letters, and alphabet blocks. As the children play with these things, stress and repeat letter sounds. Encourage the children to do the same.
- Alphabet books about topics your preschoolers love can be a source of great interest. Children learn by seeing a letter's shape along with a picture of something that begins with that letter's sound. The children will learn to look at the printed letter and picture while saying and hearing the letter sound.
- Use print throughout the classroom and the children's own writing to surround them with letters. As part of your classroom activities, refer to posters, nameplates on cubbies and tables, children's written "stories," and toy labels. Be sure to point out letters and letter sounds.
- Play sound games with small groups of your preschoolers. Let them take turns matching printed letters with their sounds. They will begin to name different objects that begin with the same letter. Have them try to form letter shapes with their bodies while making the letters' sounds.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Do the children point out letters of the alphabet on environmental print or books?
- Are the children showing more interest in the alphabet or alphabet toys?
- Are the children aware of the sounds of some letters?

Take a look at more fun with letter sounds

Letters, Letters, Everywhere

In Frank's preschool classroom, he and his co-teacher make letters and letter sounds part of every child's daily experience. They have letter blocks in the block center and letter puzzles in the manipulatives corner. There are alphabet books in the library center and letter stencils in the art center. The teachers ask their preschoolers to "sign in" when they arrive at school, helping them learn to identify their names. The children's cubbies and seats at their tables are labeled with their names as well. Frank makes a point to talk to the children daily about the letters in whatever they are seeing. He uses listening games to emphasize sounds: "If your name begins with bbb, you may line up for lunch." All the children in his class have improved in their ability to recognize printed letters and their sounds.



Active Letter Game

Anna's four-year-old students are working hard on learning their letters. She has made up a game they all love to play, especially when they need to burn off excess energy. Anna has each letter of the alphabet cut out of brightly colored foam sheets. She takes a handful of letters and strews them on the grass on the playground. The children line up on the sidewalk. When she calls out a letter name, the children find that letter, and then tell Anna what sound it makes.

I'm Getting the Feel of It

Four-year-old Keeley has a visual impairment. In her inclusive preschool class her teachers work with her to help her learn letter sounds. Along with Braille and textured storybooks, they provide Keeley with lots of opportunities to "feel" raised letters. There are letters made out of materials like playdough, clay, and tiles. When the class looks at letters as a group, Keeley touches her letters and identifies them that way. Other children in the class also benefit from learning with Keeley's letters. Using the sense of touch helps reinforce the shape and "feel" of the letters while the children say their sounds.

