

Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Exploring Magazines and Catalogs

Alphabet Awareness

Before children are able to read, they must understand that letters and words are symbols used to capture spoken words. This practice guide includes activities to develop toddlers' understanding that letters and words are symbols with meaning. This is an important building block for later reading.

What is the practice?

Print includes pictures, letters and words. Toddlers make the connection between print and what the print represents by having opportunities to explore print material. Adults can help if they describe the relationship between the words and their meaning. Toddlers learn that print carries meaning and that meanings change when different pictures, letters, or words are put together. Children must understand that printed symbols convey meaning before they can learn to “decode” or “read” letters and words.



What does the practice look like?

Seeing how print and its meaning are related can happen when you and a toddler look at pictures or print. Share catalogs, magazines, store fliers, newspapers, etc. and talk about what the words and pictures mean. Let toddlers use these kinds of printed materials in ways that have meaning to them. For example, they might like to cut out pictures or words. They can paste them on paper to make simple stories or shopping lists.

How do you do the practice?

Toddlers can learn about print in a world of different ways. Looking through fliers, magazines, books, newspapers, or catalogs and “reading” signs along the road are a few of the ways.

- Start by finding which type of printed material is most interesting to the toddler. Some children are attracted to colorful materials, while others are drawn to paper that has a slick finish.
- There are many activities you can do with printed materials. You could help your toddler find pictures in a grocery store flier of foods he likes. Cut them out, then tape or paste them on paper to make a pretend “menu.”
- Encourage the toddler to sit with you at the computer as you browse children’s web sites. Searching children’s sites on the Internet will help you find appropriate sites for the child. When something on a web site catches the child’s attention, stop and read what is written. Show him what you are reading and help him make the connection between the words and what they describe.
- Show the toddler that he did well by smiling and commenting on his efforts. The toddler is more likely to stay involved with a little support from you.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the toddler want to look at and talk about magazines or shopping fliers with you?
- Does the toddler seem pleased about his attempts to “read” printed material?
- Does the toddler ask you about the words and pictures in magazines or fliers?

Take a look at more magazines and catalogs

Let's Look and Talk!

Hannah's home visitor, Jean, knows how strapped for money the toddler's family is. She works hard to find literacy opportunities that are free or do not cost very much. Hannah's mom uses the public library to borrow books to read. Jean points out that store fliers which highlight shopping "specials" are also good sources for literacy activities. Hannah's mom saves the fliers and ad pages, setting them aside. She always has a number of different ones covered with colorful print and pictures. Hannah's mom uses these materials to engage Hannah in conversations about the pictures and the printed words. She helps Hannah begin to understand how the printed letters come together to form words related to the pictures. Hannah's mom knows they are great free learning tools for Hannah. The toddler often spots such fliers in stores and shows them to her mom.



Free Activity-Specific Print

Anna, who teaches a classroom of 2-year-olds, works closely with her early childhood consultant. They have been talking about how to offer more opportunities for her children to interact with printed materials. Anna came up with the idea of putting catalogs in each of the centers in her classroom. She put grocery ads in the play kitchen and a flier from a home building store in the blocks corner. She found a few book catalogs for the reading nook. Anna and her assistant point these out to children when they are playing in the various centers. The adults ask the children questions such as "What's on the paper?" and "What does this mean?" They encourage the children to look at the pictures and print often and to make pretend shopping lists.



Language Card

Ethan is in a classroom for 2½-year-olds. Though Ethan is learning a lot, he is not talking as quickly as his peers. His teacher wants to encourage Ethan to speak and provides literacy experiences especially for him. Together, the teacher and Ethan find his favorite classroom activities. They find a picture for each activity and paste the picture on his special play card. When it is time to play, Ethan's teacher encourages him to select the activity on the card he wants to do. She then asks Ethan to say the appropriate word. Ethan loves his card and carries it around all the time.

