

Take a look at more letter fun with toddlers

Letter-Shaped Stamps

Ms. Amy, the center's early interventionist, gathers four two-year-olds together at a table. She puts out stamp pads and stamps of various shapes, including letters. She shows the children how to move with care from the stamp pad to the paper. Next, she shows the toddlers what happens when the stamp is pressed onto paper. While they are playing with the stamps, Ms. Amy keeps up a running conversation with the children. She talks about what they are doing, what color ink they are using, and what shapes their stamps are. As children reach for the letter stamps, Ms. Amy points out which letters start each child's name. She shows them how to stamp their names with the individual letters.



Alphabet Pop Beads

Maurice, who is 30 months old, loves his home visitor Ella's interlocking alphabet beads. He has gotten better and better at snapping them together and pulling them apart. "Look at that, Maurice," his mom says. "That string of beads is almost as tall as you are!" Maurice laughs. "What's it say?" he asks. Maurice knows that letters make words, but he does not know what words his beads have made. "Well, it doesn't really say words," Ella explains, "because letters have to be in a special order to say something. Let's hear what this sounds like. Maybe your mom should help me with this one." They both laugh as Ella and Maurice's mom try to translate the long line of letters into a nonsense word. Maurice says, "Let's say, 'Maurice and Mommy and Ella like beads.' Would that take a lot of beads?" "Let's try it," Ella says.



ABC Cookie Cutters

Randi, a toddler with visual impairment, likes playing with play dough with her home visitor Deon. Today Deon comes in with a set of alphabet cookie cutters. "Those are neat," Randi's mom says. "Here, Randi, let's roll out your play dough so we can try them." Deon gives Randi an R. "Feel the lines and curves on that letter, Randi? That's R, like in your name. R for Rrrrandi." He stresses the sounds to make them distinct. "I can make one," Randi says. She allows her mom to guide her hands placing the cookie cutter onto a circle of play dough. "Okay, press down," her mom says.

"You made an R!" Deon exclaims. "Feel how your letter has the same shape as the plastic one?" Her mom helps guide her hands to compare the letters. "I made R," Randi says proudly.



Take a look at more toddlers learning letters

The Trick Is Texture

Ms. Kim, who teaches toddlers, often co-teaches with her center's early intervention specialist, Ms. Bella. They are focusing on activities that can promote literacy skills for young children. Ms. Kim notices that many of her toddlers tend to prefer toys that are interesting to touch. They do not show much interest in the flat alphabet cards she has in the classroom. Ms. Bella helps her and the children make a set of textured alphabet letters. The adults cut large letter shapes out of sturdy cardboard. The children glue bits of sandpaper and a variety of textured fabric and wallpaper scraps onto each letter. While they work, Ms. Kim talks to them about the letters on which they are working. The children enjoy participating in this project, and the textured letters become favorite classroom materials.



Find Your Letter!

Kaeden, 31 months old, loves playing with Victor, his home visitor. One day Victor brings a collection of rubber stamps and different colored ink pads. Victor sets a big piece of paper on Kaeden's kitchen table and sets out the box of stamps. "Look, Mom," Kaeden says. "He got some letters." "Should we try to stamp something with the letters?" his mom asks, but Kaeden is already busy stamping away. He gives Victor and his mom each a letter, and directs them to stamp on the paper too. "Look, you have K," Victor says to Kaeden. "You found your letter!" "What's your letter?" Kaeden asks him, and they both search for a V for Victor to use. "What about your mom?" Victor asks. "M for Mom," Kaeden's mom laughs, and they each stamp their letters and add designs with their favorite stamps.

Letter Towers

Mr. Mike plays with alphabet blocks alongside a few children in his inclusive class of toddlers. One of the children, Brandon, has low muscle tone and poor trunk control. Mr. Mike positions Brandon with bolsters so he can stay upright successfully and reach for the blocks around him. "Brandon, what are you building?" Mr. Mike asks. "Tower," Brandon answers, as the other children stack the blocks on top of each other, hoping to knock them down. "Okay, let's try it," Mr. Mike says. He steadies Brandon's hand by holding his wrist as Brandon guides a block onto the stack. "Great!" Mr. Mike says. "And look at the letter on this block. This is a B, like in your name. B for Brandon." Brandon looks at the block and reaches for another one. "This my name?" he asks. "Nope, that one is A, like in Annie's name," Mr. Mike says, pointing to a child playing nearby. Brandon places the A block atop the tower, and knocks the tower down with a satisfying crash.



Especially for practitioners working with toddlers!

B Is for Book

Alphabet Awareness

Before children can learn to read words, they first have to recognize the letters of the alphabet. ABC books introduce toddlers to the letters of the alphabet and to the corresponding sounds of each letter.

What is the practice?

Reading ABC books with the toddlers in your class helps them learn that each letter has its own name and its own sound. Reading and sharing ABC books helps children become interested in the alphabet by teaching letter recognition and letter sounds. Children who can identify letters and distinguish letter sounds have a considerable advantage in learning to read.

What does the practice look like?

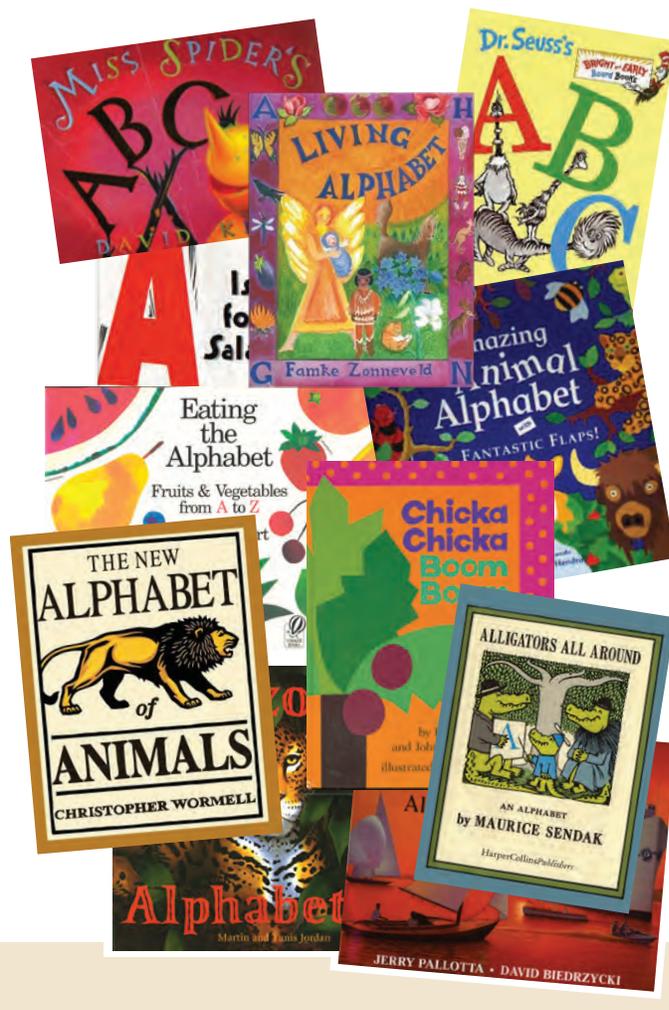
Paging through an alphabet book, a responsive adult points out letters and sounds based on what captures the child's interest. This helps toddlers start to identify letters and develop a connection between the shapes they see and the sounds they hear.

The adult can ask the toddler questions about what she sees on the page. She can help the child listen for the sounds in a group of words with the same initial consonants.

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities to read ABC books throughout the school day. Putting ABC books in easy-to-reach spots and in different centers allows toddlers easy access to the materials.

- ABC books come in a variety of styles. Choose books that are easy for the toddlers in your class to handle. Look for board books or oversized books with bright, colorful pictures.
- Share an ABC book at circle time and, while pointing to each letter, have the toddlers sound out each letter with you.
- Ask the children to think of what other words begin with the letter sound.
- Help children identify the letters that start their names and use those as a starting point for listening for similar sounds.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the toddlers in your class showing interest in books?
- Do they point to the pictures and letters in the book?
- Do the toddlers in your class show interest in ABC books?

Take a look at more fun with ABC books

A Favorite ABC Book

Home visitor Alma usually brings books for 22-month-old Tameeka to look at with her mom between visits. One that Tameeka looks forward to seeing is a book that has a big letter on one page. Something interesting that starts with that letter is on the facing page. As they go through the book looking at each letter/picture pair, Alma asks, "What's on this page, Tameeka?" "Fits," Tameeka says, as they look at the pages with the letter F and a bright blue fish. "That's right! It's a fish," Alma says. "Look at it splash! What sound does 'fish' start with?" Together they stretch out the word, and repeat the Fff sound. Tameeka's mom reads the next page, and they examine the shape of the letter G and listen for its sound. Sometimes Tameeka loses interest before they finish the book, but she is excited to keep it until Alma's next visit. She knows her mom will be happy to look at it with her whenever she wants.



"It's Your Letter!"

Krista, a teacher in a classroom of two-year-olds, finds a small group of children in the library corner. They are looking intently at a new brightly-colored book. "You found the new alphabet book," Krista says. "What do you think of it?" The children want Krista to read it to them. She opens the book and asks what is on the first page. They identify the pictures, all objects that begin with A. Krista shows them the A by tracing the letter with her finger and encouraging them to do the same. "Who has this letter in their name?" Krista asks. "Adrian, it's your letter, isn't it? Your name starts with A too!" All the other children want to find 'their' letters as they go through the pages.

Signs and Letter Sounds

Carolina, who is almost three, has some difficulties with understanding everything she hears. Her early interventionist Rhea uses alphabet books along with sign language. This helps Carolina make the connection between what she sees on the page and what sounds she hears. They start with the C page. "Cccc for Carolina," Rhea says while she signs, exaggerating the sounds. "Can you trace the C with your finger?" Carolina studies the picture as she moves her hand across the page. "And here's how we make C with our fingers," Rhea adds, showing her the sign. "What are some other words besides Carolina that have the Cccc sound?" They use the familiar pictures in the book to say and sign some other words that begin with C. Carolina even comes up with one of her own—the name of her big brother, Carlos, who is playing nearby.



Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Letters and Symbols Are Everywhere

Alphabet Awareness

Learning that symbols and printed letters have meaning is an important early skill for toddlers. Symbols and letters are everywhere in a toddler's world. It is important to help toddlers gain an understanding of what they mean.

What is the practice?

A look around the home and neighborhood will present many opportunities for a toddler to begin to learn and understand that letters and symbols have meaning. Point out that red sign with the word STOP on it at the end of the street. Explain that it means that the car or bus has to stop. You can help the toddler connect the word stop and the color red in the sign with the stopping car.

What does the practice look like?

Look at a magazine or flyer with a toddler. Help her find signs (such as traffic signs) and symbols (such as a favorite fast-food restaurant logo) that she recognizes. This helps her learn that signs and symbols have meaning. The toddler will benefit from these activities. They help her develop and understand that there is a connection between abstract symbols and letters and the objects that they represent.



How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities to help your toddler make this connection as you move about your community with her.

- Begin by noticing the words or signs that catch the toddler's attention. Perhaps she will notice the blinking "open" sign in the shop window or the red stoplight above the street.
- Follow the child's lead by acknowledging what the child is noticing: "I see you looking at that blinking sign in the window."
- Explain what the sign means: "That sign says open and it means we can go in the store and buy something."
- Go to the door and show her that it is open and you can go inside.
- The next time you see an open sign on a store, whether it is lit or not, point it out. Remind her of what it means.
- When a sign or symbol catches your toddler's eye, point to it and explain what it means.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the toddler notice signs or symbols more frequently?
- Does the toddler enjoy looking at the signs you show her?
- Does the toddler ask you about the signs or symbols she sees?

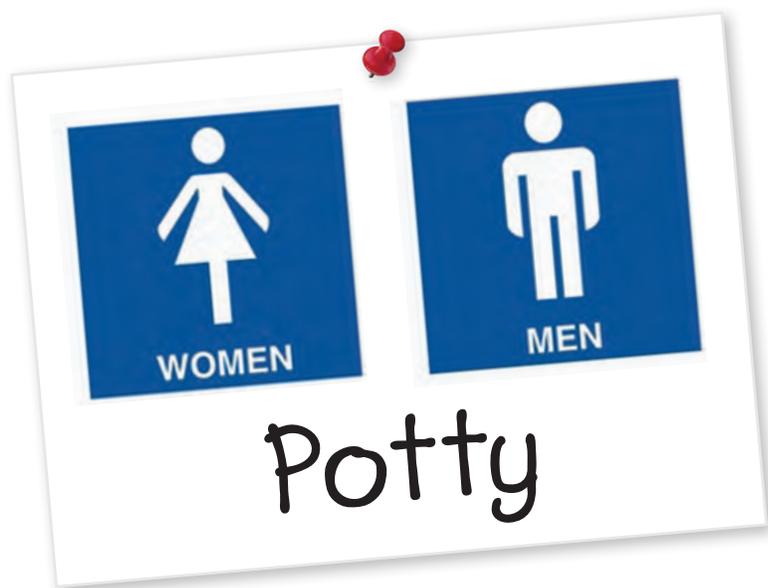
Take a look at more letters and symbols

Finding Fun With Traffic Signs

Ryan likes to play with cars and trucks, rolling them across his grandmother's floor. In order to help Ryan learn about symbols and letters, his home visitor and his grandmother made some traffic signs. They started with a green traffic light, a stop sign, an arrow pointing left, and another pointing right. Beginning with the stop sign and green light, they helped Ryan learn what they mean. When he is racing his car around and his grandmother holds up the green light, he is free to go. He also knows he must stop racing when the stop sign is up. After he learned what an arrow sign meant, they made a symbol for driving the cars in a circle and for driving backward. Ryan loves this game with his grandmother and repeatedly asks her to play with him.



Universal Symbols in a Toddler Classroom



The early childhood specialist comes regularly to Maria's classroom of two-year-olds. She and Maria have taken symbols from the universal list of symbols that fit into the routine of her classroom. She has symbols for the bathroom, danger, etc., placing them at appropriate locations around the room. Maria also has the written word under the symbol. Frequently, when the children are near a symbol and the word, Maria will point out the symbol and word. She will talk to the children about their different features. At snack time, they will sometimes play the symbol game. Maria will ask one child at a time to find a particular symbol around the classroom.

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.

