

*Especially for parents of preschoolers!* 

# Alpha Fun

 *Letters and Spelling*

Preschoolers can recognize and identify letters—especially familiar letters like those in their names. When you join your child in his play with alphabet toys, you encourage his interest in learning.

## What is the practice?

Playing, talking, and asking questions as your child enjoys alphabet toys makes letter learning fun and exciting. Letter blocks, magnetic letters, and alphabet puzzles are the kinds of toys that can spark parent-child talks about letters. They let children become familiar with the ABCs. Such toys also help preschoolers begin to form words without the added pressure of writing.

## What does the practice look like?

Let your child play with letter-shaped cookie cutters in corn-meal, play dough, or real biscuit dough. Cut letter shapes from sponges for her to play with in the bathtub. Use them as stamps to make designs with washable paint. Talk to her about what she's doing as she plays. As your child lines up magnetic letters on the refrigerator door, stacks alphabet blocks, or strings alphabet beads, talk with her about what she is doing. Encourage her interest and curiosity about letter sounds.



## How do you do the practice?

When your child plays with alphabet toys, add to the fun by having lots of them. Praise his efforts and follow his lead.

- Let your child tell you the letters in his name using blocks, stamps, or other toys that have those letters. Show him how to use them to form his name. Help him discover that even though letters may be different colors or sizes on different toys, their names stay the same.
- Show your child how the letters on her alphabet toys are paired with sounds. For example, when your child hands you the block with *T* on it, name the letter and its sound. Together try to think of words that start with the *Ttt* sound.
- Try to avoid making alphabet toys seem too “hard” or too much like work. Most preschoolers are beginning to understand that we use letters to make words. But they might be unsure about their exact sounds and shapes. Show interest and pleasure in his attempts at learning through play. That is more important than expecting him to remember all the letters right away.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child play eagerly with alphabet toys?
- Does your child point out familiar letters on his toys and other places he sees them?
- Does your child name sounds and letters when you are playing with alphabet toys together?

# Take a look at more fun with alphabet toys

## *Singing to Remember*

Three-year-old Jake brings an ABC puzzle to his mom at the kitchen table. "I need help," he says. "Let's take a look," his mom responds. She helps Jake tip the brightly colored foam pieces out onto the table. "Where should we start?" his mom asks. Jake picks up the purple J. "You found your letter," his mom says. "J is for...?" "Jake," Jake finishes, and he fits the piece into the right spot. He places a few more letters correctly based on their colors and shapes. Then Jake pauses. "What's the first letter?" his mom asks. "Should we sing *The Alphabet Song* and figure it out?" They use the song to place the A. Jake's mom helps him return to the song each time he gets confused about where the pieces go.



## *Magnetic Grocery List*

Four-year-old Sam likes playing with the colorful magnets his mom got him. There are numbers, letters, and basic shapes in the set. Sam loves moving them around on the refrigerator door. When his mom runs out of things she needs to buy at the store, she asks Sam to use his magnets to "write" a reminder. "We're all out of milk, Sam," his mom says. "Can you put that on the refrigerator with your letters so we remember to get more?" Sam can hear the first *Mmm* sound in the word. With Mom's help, he figures out other letters to use. Sam likes this important family job. Before each shopping trip, he reads back the list to make sure they don't forget anything.



## *Stringing Along*

Jordan, who is 4 years old and deaf since birth, is stringing large plastic beads with her dad. The beads are different colors and have letters printed on their sides. Jordan shows her dad the beads she has strung on a cord, signing the colors and letter names. "That's right," her dad says, speaking and signing. "And what's this one?" He points to a letter A on her cord. Jordan signs the letter A. "That's right, that's A," Dad signs. "What words start with the letter A?" They take turns signing *apple*, *arm*, and *ant*. "We can make those words," Jordan signs. Together they sort through the beads for more letters they can add to the cord to form words.



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# Listen Hear

 Letters and Spelling

Before your preschooler begins to read or spell, she must learn the letters of the alphabet and their sounds. Learning letter/sound matches helps prepare preschoolers for reading.

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## What is the practice?

Introduce your preschooler to letters and their sounds. Sounding out letters as you name, point to, or draw the letters helps preschoolers connect a letter and its sound. Alphabet and letter/sound recognition help your preschooler to have early reading success.

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## What does the practice look like?

Follow your child's interest. Everyday play activities can help your child learn letter sounds. Use books, games, and alphabet toys such as ABC stamps and magnetic letters to discuss letters and their sounds.

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## How do you do the practice?

Start with games, books, and activities that interest your child. While your child is playing, help her to notice the letters around her and make letter sounds. Remember to be supportive and encouraging while your preschooler learns letter sounds, as it may take time.

- Share an alphabet book with your child and ask her to say the letter sounds with you. Encourage your child to think of more words that start with a particular letter.
- Play games such as *I Spy* using letters and their sounds. "I spy something that starts with the letter *B*. Remember what sound a *B* makes? *Bbb*, *Bbb*, can you guess what I'm looking at?"
- Use chalk to write letters in each square of a sidewalk hopscotch grid. Your child can say the name of each letter and something that starts with that letter sound as she hops from square to square.
- Have your child help you write a grocery list and ask her what letter certain items start with. If she doesn't know, you can help her out. Learning letters and their sounds takes time.



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## How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your preschooler enthusiastic about letters?
- Does your preschooler know some letter sounds?
- Is your preschooler interested in "writing" letters?

# Take a look at more listening for letter sounds

## Play Dough Letters

Four-year-old Maria loves to play with play dough. She uses letter-shaped cookie cutters to make impressions in the dough. Maria's mom notices how involved she is in her play. Mom sits down beside her daughter and points to the *M* that Maria has cut out. "There is a letter *M* for *Maria*," she says. Mom makes a *Mmmmm* sound and says, "That's the first letter and the first sound in your name." Areli's eyes light up and she says, "Let's make all my letters! All my sounds!"



## Alphabet Puzzle

Four-year-old Miguel loves to put together puzzles. His grandmother asks him if he wants to help her put together an alphabet puzzle. They sit together on the living room floor and take turns putting the puzzle pieces together. For each piece they pick up, Miguel's grandmother says the name of the letter and makes its sound. She asks him, "Do you think you could help me make the letter sounds?" "Yeah!" Miguel says as he enjoys the one-on-one attention from his grandmother. Miguel thinks it's fun to make the letter sounds with her, and he likes to sound them out loudly.

## That's the Point

Four-year-old Marlee has language delays. She loves looking at books and pictures. Her mom spots Marlee looking at an alphabet book. She sits down beside Marlee on the floor. She points to the letters on the page and sounds each one out. Marlee is very observant, but not very vocal. After naming the letters, Marlee's mom asks, "Can you point to the letter *T*?" Marlee looks at the page. After a few moments, she points to the letter *T*. "Good job, Marlee! Do you remember what sounds the letter *T* makes?" Mom then makes a *Ttt* sound.

