

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

A Is for Apple

 Rhymes and Sound Awareness

Before preschoolers can learn to read, they need to become familiar with letter sounds. Linking letter sounds with pictures is a great way to introduce your young child to the alphabet.

What is the practice?

While looking at picture books with your preschooler, have her name the pictures. Repeat the name of the picture while stressing the word's first letter sound. Have your child repeat the first letter with you. Alphabet books that show each alphabet letter by itself will help your child learn to identify written letters.

What does the practice look like?

There are many ways to help your child connect a picture of something with the first letter of its name. For example, a book might have a picture of a lion and a big letter L on a page. This can help a child connect the picture with the letter and with the *Lll* sound he hears when you read the word "lion" to him. Reading and sharing books with your preschooler is a great time to label objects and talk about letter sounds.



How do you do the practice?

- Follow your child's interests when choosing books or other reading materials. If your preschooler likes horses, for example, read a book or a magazine about horses. Point to and talk about the pictures. When you point to a picture of a saddle, ask what letter or letter sound begins the word *saddle*. Be patient with your child.
- Take turns naming pictures in a book. Ask your child to listen closely to the first sounds of their names. When you find a barn, for example, help your child "stretch out" the sounds in *barn* and hear the *Bbb* sound.
- Once your child "hears" the first sound in a word, have him think of other words with the same sound. Look through the book for pictures of other things whose names begin with B and say them together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child becoming familiar with letter sounds?
- Does your child show more interest in books?
- Is your child becoming aware of letters, letter sounds, and words?

Take a look at more letters and sounds

A Favorite Book

Three-year-old Lily picks up a book for her mom to read to her and her big sister, Daisy. It is an alphabet book that Lily's mom has read to them again and again. Lily likes it because it has big, bright, colorful pictures and she never tires of looking at it. Lily hands the book to her mom. "Do you want me to read your favorite book again, Lily?" "Yes, Momma, read it." Mom reads the book the way she always does, stressing the rhyming words and letter sounds. This delights her daughters. When they finish the book, Lily smiles and begs excitedly, "Read it again, Momma!"



One More Time!

Daniel, age 4, loves to look at books and turn pages. He even likes to play with his books, stacking them on top of each other. Every night at bedtime his mom reads him a book. Today it is an alphabet book. Daniel's mom reads a page, then points to the pictures on the page and names them. She points to the letter A and encourages Daniel to name things on the page that begin with that letter. Daniel points to pictures if he doesn't know the words for them, and his mom stresses the beginning Aaa sound as she says their names. When Mom finishes the book, she puts it down. Daniel picks it up and hands it back to her. "One more time, please!" he says.

Letters and Signs

Four-year-old Jacob is deaf. His mom and dad have been using sign language with him since he was born. It is right before lunch and Jacob is sitting at the kitchen table looking at books. Jacob's dad is making lunch. Mom sits down with Jacob and asks him in sign if he would like her to read him a book. Jacob bobs his right hand in the sign for **yes**. Jacob chooses an alphabet book about animals for his mom to read to him. She points to each picture and letter and then makes the letter sign. She also points to the pictures on each page and signs their names. Jacob chooses to sign a few of the letters with his mom.



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Sounds Like ...

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Most preschoolers can use speech to let others know their wants and needs. Now they are ready to use more complex language. Playing games that let them practice rhyming, listening for different sounds, and blending sounds together helps them get ready to read and write.

What is the practice?

Many daily activities can help preschoolers pay attention to sounds and learn how sounds are the same or different. Research shows that children who practice playing with sounds have an easier time learning to read and write when they start school.



What does the practice look like?

Play rhyming games with your preschooler by saying a word and having her think of one that “sounds the same.” Ask her to think of all the words she can to describe a dog or a cat. These are two kinds of verbal play that help build vocabulary and encourage preschoolers to notice speech sounds.

How do you do the practice?

There are many times each day that you can help your preschooler develop word skills. Most preschoolers love to talk, so it can be as easy as following his interest and playing a “talking game.”

- When in the car or waiting at a doctor's office, take turns spotting something and thinking of words that rhyme with its name.
- Help your preschooler blend and take apart the sounds of words by slowly saying a word, like *birdhouse*. Then have him repeat the two smaller words quickly. You can reverse this, too, by having him break long words apart into their sounds: “Say *groundhog* slowly.”
- Have fun with silly songs by replacing the real words with pretend words. Replace real words in a familiar song with your child's name, favorite foods, places, or friends.
- Take turns with your child thinking of all the words you can that describe a particular object. Especially use something familiar, like a favorite toy or a pet. This helps build your child's vocabulary, and gives him practice putting what he sees into words.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child enthusiastic about singing familiar songs and nursery rhymes with you?
- Does your child enjoy playing with words and sounds?
- Does your child attempt to make up his own rhymes and songs?

Take a look at sound play with preschoolers

Red All Over

While Dad drives Joey to preschool, they like to play games about what they see out their windows. One of Joey's favorites is pointing out everything he sees of a certain type. For example, one morning they try to find everything red they can see. They call out "red car!" or "red stop sign!" or "red house!" each time they see something red. Sometimes Joey doesn't know the word for what he sees, and his dad teaches him a new word. An example was the time he saw a billboard with a picture of a red life jacket.



In the Act with Costumes

Marnie likes to play dress up with her dad. She acts out the parts of a princess, doctor, or monster with her costume collection. Because her recent favorite story at bedtime is *Mary Poppins* (P. L. Travers), Marnie's dad finds her a fancy old hat and a black umbrella. She can pretend to be the story's magical nanny. Marnie's dad reads the beginning of the story, then tells Marnie, "Okay, you're floating through the air with your umbrella. Where are you going?" He encourages her to act out what he reads. He has her add to the story by using her own imagination. As soon as "Mary Poppins" wishes the story's happy Banks family farewell, Marnie says, "Let's do it again!" They take it from the top.

Rhyme Time

Walter, a 4-year-old with a speech-and-language delay, loves pretending to be a flying superhero. While they ride the bus to his preschool, Walter's grandmother sometimes suggests playing their favorite rhyming game. Walter gets to pick the first word. Often it's something to do with superheroes or something outside the bus window that catches his eye. Walter and Grandma take turns rhyming. "Cape," Walter says, thinking of his superhero outfit. "Okay," Grandma says. "Let me think. How about...

tape?" She emphasizes the similar sounds. "I know one! Mape!" Walter yells. "That's not a word," Grandma laughs. "But it does rhyme with cape. You're right!" Sometimes Grandma rhymes a word that Walter doesn't know, and he learns something new.



"Cape!"



"Tape!"

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Fun Finger Games

 *Rhymes and Sound Awareness*

Traditional or made-up games that pair simple rhymes or songs with fun-to-do finger and hand motions are enjoyable ways to help children build language skills.

What is the practice?

Fingerplays bring rhymes to life as children sing while making hand motions with the words of the song. Parents can do fingerplays at home to help their children improve memory and language. Rhymes help children develop phonological awareness, the ability to hear the different sounds in language, an important pre-reading skill.



What does the practice look like?

During fingerplays, children sing to different tunes while moving their hands to match the words of the song. “Climbing” their fingers in the air while singing **Eensy-Weensy Spider** and clapping their hands to make pretend thunder are examples.

How do you do the practice?

There are lots of fingerplays that let young children improve their use of language. These include fingerplays that act out familiar nursery rhymes and fingerplays that tell a story. Parents can also use fingerplays as a fun way to introduce poetry. They can create chances for their children to follow directions and learn new ideas.

- Start by sitting someplace comfortable, facing your child. Sitting at a table provides a surface for making sounds and motions with your hands. Sitting on the floor creates space for making big gestures and movements in the air.
- Choose fingerplays on topics that interest your child. For example, if your child is interested in vehicles, then she might enjoy fingerplays that allow her to make driving motions or fire-truck noises. If your child likes adventure, fingerplays that involve going on a bear hunt or meeting new creatures might interest her. Children who like to move a lot can do fingerplays that involve big movements. Other children may prefer to make small motions and movements.
- Encourage your child to think of her own words and hand motions to rhymes and songs. Provide places in the play where she can “fill in” the next word. Let your child be the storyteller with her own lyrics and creative style of expression and movement.
- Show your child your enjoyment and enthusiasm by singing, smiling, and moving along with the story or song. Let your child know that she is doing a good job by praising or going along with her ideas.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child using new vocabulary?
- Does your child remember the words and movements of fingerplays?
- Does your child show interest in creating new stories or rhymes?

Take a look at more finger games for preschoolers

Firefighter Fingerplay

Three-year-old Andre hears the sirens of a fire truck. He runs to the window of his bedroom to see it drive by. "Firefighter!" says Andre excitedly to his mother, pointing at the disappearing truck. "Time for bed" says his mother, lifting him into bed. "I saw the firefighter man!" says Andre, still excited. "You did! I'll bet he's going to help someone," says his mother. "And now it's time for my little fireman to go to bed." She sits on the bed next to Andre and holds up her right thumb for him to see. "This brave fireman is going to bed." She places her right thumb on her left palm. "Down on the pillow he lays his head." She curls her fingers around her thumb, as Andre starts to copy her movements. "Wraps himself in his blanket tight and plans to sleep this way all night." She closes her eyes. "But the fire alarm rings! He opens his eyes!" She opens her eyes. "Quickly he's dressed and down the pole he slides." She grips her left arm with her right hand and slides it down from wrist to elbow. Then she moves her hands to pretend to turn an imaginary steering wheel. "Then he climbs on the truck to go! go! go!" Andre laughs and mother and son do the fingerplay one more time together.



"Once there was a bunny...."

Four-year-old Madison rides in the back seat of the family car next to her grandmother. Her grandmother sees that Madison is getting restless. "Madison," she says, "Did I ever tell you about the little bunny?" Madison loves animals and quickly shakes her head "no" in anticipation. "Well," begins her grandmother, "Once there was a bunny." She makes a fist with her left hand, extending two fingers for ears. "And a green, green cabbage head," she makes a fist with her right hand. "I think I'll have some breakfast," the little bunny said." Her grandmother moves her "bunny hand" toward her "cabbage hand." "So he nibbled and he nibbled." She moves the fingers on her left hand. "Then he turned around to say,

'I think this is the time I should be hopping on my way!'" She makes hopping movements with her left hand so the "bunny" hops away from the cabbage. Madison giggles. "Now let's see if you can make the bunny," says her grandmother. She begins to teach Madison the fingerplay, amusing her for the remainder of the car ride.

"One Little Bee"

Five-year-old Jamar has difficulty with articulation of certain sounds. He sits with his father at the kitchen table eating breakfast. As Dad starts to pour some honey on Jamar's toast, he starts reciting: "One little bee flew and flew. He met a friend, and that made two." Seeing that he has Jamar's interest, Dad continues. He carefully articulates the *b*, a sound that is hard for Jamar to pronounce. "Two little bees, busy as could be. Along came another and that made three." His father sets the honey down and holds up three fingers. "Three little bees, wanted one more / Found one soon and that made four." He holds up four fingers. "Four little bees, going to the hive / Spied their little brother, and that made five." He holds up five fingers. "Five little bees working every hour / Buzz away, bees, and find another flower!" Jamar smiles. "Did you like that?" asks his father. Jamar nods and his father says, "Let's say it together. One little bee...." He carefully articulates the *b* sound at the beginning of the word. Jamar joins in, copying his father's articulations and hand movements.

