

Especially for parents of toddlers!

Letters and Symbols Are Everywhere

Symbols and Letters

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

What is the practice?

As you move around your community together, you will find opportunities to help your child understand signs. For example, she can learn that a red sign with the word *STOP* means that a car or bus must stop.

What does the practice look like?

Signs (stop signs) and symbols (fast-food logos) can help your toddler learn that symbols and words have meaning. She will benefit by seeing the connections between symbols and letters and the things they represent.

How do you do the practice?

Discover ways to help your toddler see these connections as you go out in your community together.

- Begin by noticing the words or signs that catch your toddler's attention. Perhaps she will notice the blinking *Open* sign in a shop window or the red stoplight hanging over the street.
- Follow your child's lead and comment on what she notices. "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, point it out to your toddler and remind her what it means.
- When you see a sign or symbol that you think your toddler will like, point it out. Explain what it means (an ice cream cone, a steaming coffee cup, a lighted *EXIT* sign, etc.).



How do you know the practice worked?

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

Take a look at more letters and symbols

The Sign Game

Maria, who is 3 years old, and her dad like to play the sign game when doing errands. When they get in the car and start driving, Maria's dad says, "I see a red sign. What should I do?" Maria squeals back, "Stop! Stop sign!" As her dad stops the car, he says "I'm so glad you know that the red sign means stop." When they get to the store, Dad points to an arrow on the door, He says, "What should I do now, Maria?" Again she laughs and says, "Go in." Dad points out a new sign, explaining to Maria what it means, and becomes part of their game.



Ride and Read

Two-year-old Jonathan loves to ride his little push car down the sidewalk and play the sign game. His mom has four different signs. She has a stop sign, an arrow pointing right, an arrow pointing left, and a green light. While Jonathan moves his car up and down the sidewalk, Mom stands in the middle and is the traffic director. If Mom is holding the stop sign up when Jonathan reaches her, he stops. If she holds up an arrow, then Jonathan turns. At the green sign he keeps on going. Jonathan loves the game and wants to play it frequently.

Picture Signs

Nicky is a toddler who sometimes has trouble remembering things. He has learned, along with his mom, that signs can be a fun way to help his memory. Together, Nicky and his mom made signs with pictures and words on their home computer. They have taped them up all over the house. They put a picture of Nicky with his name on his bedroom door. A sign with a red symbol for fire helps him remember not to touch the stove. His picture and name are posted on the kitchen shelf with his own snacks. In Nicky's bedroom, photos of his favorite toys mark the shelves where they belong. Mom and Nicky make new signs whenever Nicky wants to remind himself or his family of something. They take down the old ones as he no longer needs them.

