

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

What's Your Letter?

Symbols and Letters

Before children can read or write, they need to become familiar with the look and shape of letters. Interacting with letters they can see and touch helps children become interested in the alphabet. Provide alphabet toys for your child with letters of different textures, colors, and sizes to encourage his interest. Conversation as he plays with letters can help him understand the way our alphabet is used and organized. Play with alphabet toys can help toddlers feel confident about learning.

What is the practice?

Interacting with your child around a variety of alphabet toys makes letter learning fun. These toys can be alphabet blocks, magnetic or foam letters, or alphabet puzzles. Any toy with letters prominently displayed so your toddler has many chances to look at them is good.

What does the practice look like?

Let your toddler play with letter-shaped cookie cutters in damp sand, cornmeal, play dough, or real dough. Cut kitchen sponges into letter shapes. Show her how to use them as bathtub toys or as stamps with finger paint. Enjoying these activities together while talking to your toddler about what she's doing is making good use of alphabet toys. Let your child arrange magnetic alphabet letters on the refrigerator door, stack alphabet blocks, or string large alphabet beads. Each play time with alphabet toys helps her become more familiar and comfortable with letters.



How do you do the practice?

Make play with alphabet toys fun by providing a variety of materials, praising your child's efforts, and following his lead.

- Help your child start to learn the letters in his name. Point out these letters on blocks, stamps, or other materials. Praise him when he finds or recognizes them.
- Point out that each letter toy your child is playing with stands for a sound. For example, when your child has the block with the letter *B* on it, name the letter and its sound. Encourage him to do the same.
- Try to avoid making alphabet toys seem too "hard" or too much like work. Even if he doesn't seem to be paying attention to the letters themselves, they are still becoming more familiar. It will make them easier to learn later on.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child play enthusiastically with alphabet toys?
- Does your child point out familiar letters on his toys or anywhere else he sees them?
- Does your child imitate you by naming sounds and letters when you are playing with alphabet toys together?

Take a look at more fun with alphabet toys

Sponge-Letter Printing

Twenty-six-month-old Tally and her mom are playing with finger paints at the kitchen table. Besides using her hands and big brushes, Tally uses sponges her mom has cut into the letters of her name. She picks up the *T* and runs it through the red paint. “Look what you did using the *T*,” her mom exclaims. “You made some red.” Tally looks down at the streak on her paper. “That’s the one that goes *ttt, ttt* like in your name,” Mom continues. Tally picks up the *L* and looks up while her mom makes the sound for it. “What are you going to make with that?” Tally puts some blue paint on the *L* and streaks that across her page. “Very pretty,” her mom says. “Can you try pressing it down, like this?” She presses the *L* sponge directly onto the paper, making a print. “I can do that,” Tally says after watching, and carefully presses the sponge. “That’s great!” her mom says. “Your *L* is just like mine!” Tally examines the two papers. “I made *L*,” she says proudly.



Making My Name!

Dallas, who is almost 3 years old, loves helping his dad fix and paint things around the house. One morning his dad tells him they’re going to make a wooden sign for Dallas’ room. “That way everyone will know it’s your room!” Together they trace the letters in Dallas’ name in pencil on blocks of sanded wood. They say the names of each letter as they go. Then Dallas watches from a safe distance as his dad uses a table saw to cut out the letters. “What color do you want for your *D*?” his dad asks. “That’s the most important letter, because it’s first.” Dallas picks a color for each of his letters, and together they apply base coats and the final gloss. As they work, they talk about each letter and its sound. When the project is completed, Dallas has a great new name plate for his room. And he knows all the letters of his name!

Alphabet Blocks Are Tops!

Evan, who is 30 months old and has Down syndrome, is playing with big alphabet blocks with his dad. He enjoys helping his dad pile blocks on top of each other. Then he gleefully knocks them over. “Wow, we’re making a really big tower,” Dad says. “Are you going to put even more blocks on top?” Evan nods and reaches for another block. “That block has an *E* on it,” Dad says. “It’s just like in your name. *E* for *Evan*!” Evan looks at the *E* block for a moment, then back at his dad, and asks “Evan?” “That’s right, that’s you!” his dad says. “And this is your letter—*E*.” “Evan,” the little boy repeats, and then carefully places his block on top of the others.

