

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?

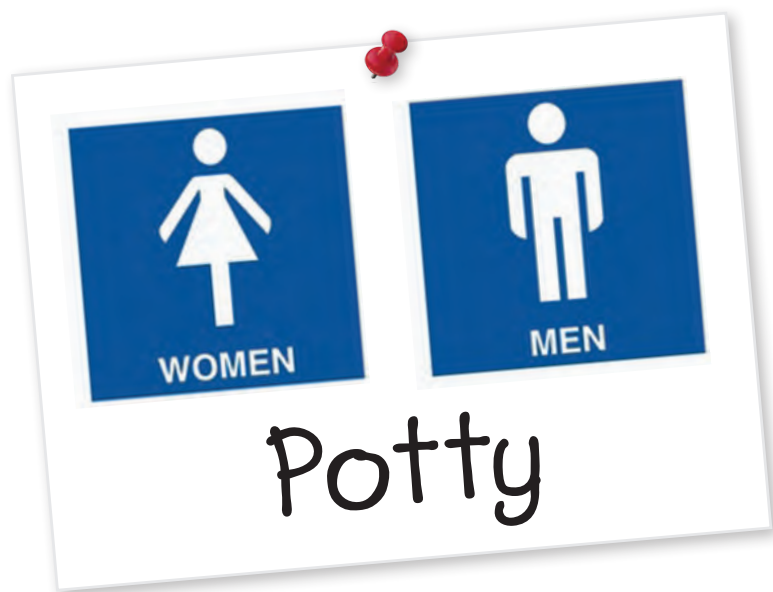
Take a look at more letters and symbols

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.