

Alphabet Knowledge

Children need many opportunities to experience print in a fun way, in conjunction with daily literacy activities. In this way, they become familiar with the letters of the alphabet. Letter recognition and identification are necessary before letter-sound associations can be made. In fact, knowledge of the alphabet, specifically letter naming, is one of the best predictors of early reading success (Adams, 1990).

Initially, children learn to sing the "Alphabet Song," and recognize familiar letters (e.g., letters in their names). Then, they begin to identify those letters, and finally, some children learn to form those letters. In other words, when learning letters, children should be encouraged to recognize the letter (show me the letter p), identify the letter (tell me the name of that letter), and form the letter (practice writing the letter shape). Letters can then be associated with the sounds they represent, and attempts at writing words (sound-letter correspondences) should be encouraged.

Children's names, stories, songs, poems, and environmental print can be used to introduce the letters of the alphabet. Any logical sequence can be used. Usually, common letters are used first, followed by less common letters. However, teachers may wish to use this rationale when deciding on a specific sequence:

- ✓ Begin with letters that occur in children's names
- ✓ Begin with letters that occur frequently in children's books
- ✓ Begin with letters that are easier for children to say
- ✓ Avoid visual confusion by separating letters that appear similar (e.g., b/d, p/q, m/n/u, f/t, i/j)
- ✓ Avoid auditory confusion by separating letters that sound similar (e.g., d/w, a/h, j/g, c/s)
- ✓ Separate letters that represent voiced and unvoiced sounds (e.g., b/p, g/k, d/t, v/f, z/s)
- ✓ Introduce vowels gradually, recognizing both long and short vowel sounds (i.e., letter name - Amy/Eve - and special sound - Andy/Emily)

Note: A suggested sequence:

m s t a f b n i p k l o d g h u c w r e y j v z x q

While using alphabet poster, charts, songs, stories, and poems...

- ✓ encourage lots of interactive discussion about the pictures
- ✓ ask many open-ended questions (e.g., Where do you think the ___ is going? Why is he ___? Could this be a real ___?)
- ✓ relate discussion to children's own experiences (e.g., Have you ever seen a ___? Where? Have you been to the ___? What color was the ___? How big was the ___?)
- ✓ develop concepts about the pictures (e.g., What other ___ do you know? How are ___ and ___ the same? How are they different?)
- ✓ Have children make up sentences using as many pictures from the picture as possible (start with 2-3 and build up to more - including other words that begin with the target letter)
- ✓ role-play the actions in the pictures with children
- ✓ have each child match his/her name card with the appropriate alphabet letter (start with beginning letter of name, gradually add last letter, or any letter within name)
- ✓ brainstorm other objects or names that begin with the target letter
- ✓ draw pictures (picture webs) of words that begin with the target letter
- ✓ relate everyday experiences to a specific letter (e.g., today we are going to read a book about a turkey. Who can first the first letter of turkey on the alphabet chart?)
- ✓ include many hands-on, interactive activities with each letter of the alphabet

In addition, children may:

- ✓ sort plastic or magnetic letters
- ✓ stand up and show a large letter card as they sing the "Alphabet Song"
- ✓ match environmental print labels to letters on alphabet chart or frieze (e.g., Cheerios begin with C)
- ✓ compare and contrast letters in their names (How is my name the same as your name? How is my name different than your name?)
- ✓ play Alphabet Bingo
- ✓ locate target letter by using a "magic wand" or colored highlight tape
- ✓ write letters in the air, using large muscle movements
- ✓ write letters in shaving cream, sand or rice trays