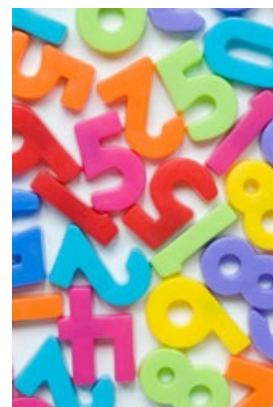


Amazing Alphabet: Using Magnetic Letters to Master Early Literacy Skills

Every parent of a preschooler knows about those colorful magnetic letters that stick to the fridge (not to mention littering every other surface in the house). But however annoying cleaning up those little ABCs might be, the magnetic alphabet can provide many amazing opportunities for preschoolers to interact with letters and build a foundation for literacy learning.

Magnetic letters provide opportunities for hands-on learning which are much more suited for the way young children learn than workbooks and flashcards. "Manipulating materials allows young children to actively construct knowledge using their senses, rather than merely passively taking in and repeating rote information," says Deanna Zerr, President of Unlimited Options and former President of the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children. "When children manipulate the letters, it adds to their memory processing and enhances their ability to recall the letter in written form later," says Julie Duffy, Pre-Kindergarten teacher at Shepherd of the Hills Christian School in Colorado. "The child is having great fun - you are interacting with their learning and newfound reading abilities emerge!"

So round up those magnetic letters and try a few of these fun, multisensory activities to help your preschooler master important early literacy skills:



Visual Discrimination is the ability to differentiate similarly shaped objects, and is an important early reading skill. For example, children must be able to see the differences between E and F or C and G before beginning the process of learning letter names and sounds.

How to practice it:

- Have your child sort magnetic letters into three groups according to how they are formed –straight lines, curved lines or both curved and straight lines –to help him focus on the similarities and differences in letters.
- The same objective can be achieved by purchasing two sets of letters and asking your child to match pairs of the same letter.
- Play a game of I Spy in which your child picks the letters in his or her name from all of the alphabet letters!

Letter Recognition is the ability to recognize and name each of the letters of the alphabet. While this is an important pre-reading skill, it will take repeated practice to master.

How to practice it:

- Begin with the uppercase letters first as they are easier to distinguish. For example, it is much easier to see the differences between B, D, P and Q than b,d, p and q.
- Create an alphabet train across the kitchen floor using magnetic letters as the train cars. Draw a simple engine and caboose on a small piece of paper and build the train from A-Z, singing the alphabet song for assistance whenever it is needed. As your child is able to recognize the capital letters, you may wish to introduce a few lowercase letters at a time. Matching just a couple pairs of upper and lowercase letters will give your child confidence and you can gradually add more into the mix.
- As you cook dinner, have your child cook up his own alphabet soup by putting all the letters into a large pot. Give your child a spoon and sing the alphabet song as he stirs the soup. When the song has ended, he can scoop up a letter (it will stick to the spoon if you use a metal one), and name the letter.

Beginning Sound Awareness is the ability to recognize the first sound in a word. Hearing the first sound in a word is a component of phonemic awareness, the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words, and one of the best predictors of reading success in young children.

How to practice it:

- Play a game of Go Fish with a fishing pole created by attaching a wooden spoon or ruler to one end of a piece of string, and a large paperclip to the other end. Spread the letters on the floor (a few at a time if they are just beginning to work on this skill), and have your child "fish" for a letter. Once a letter has been caught (the paper clip will attach itself to the magnet on the letter), your child can name the letter and the sound it makes and think of one or two words that begin with that letter.
- Give your child three letters and send her on a hunt for objects that begin with that letter from around the house. Set the timer to make it more challenging!

These ideas will help your put your magnetic letters to good use by building a foundation for literacy success for your little learner. These skills do not come naturally to children, but repeated exposure and playful practice will produce long term benefits as a child begins to read. The possibilities for practice are endless, so once you have tried these tips out, get creative for added alphabet practice!