

ABC & 123

Exploring Letters and Numbers

Letters and numbers are the building blocks of reading and math. Your youngster must learn not only to recognize them, but also to understand what they mean. With letters, that means learning the sounds they make in words. When it comes to numbers, it means realizing that each number stands for a quantity.

Here are some activities you can use each day to help your child recognize and understand letters and numbers.



Letters

Read alphabet books. Check the library for alphabet books, such as *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!* and *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault. These books feature letters on each page, with words and pictures to go along with them. As you read, have your youngster think of other words that begin with each letter.

Provide alphabet materials. Gather stickers and stamps with letters on them. Give your child some paper, and encourage him to make words with the letters. He can spell his name, family members' names, or other words he knows. Some other word-building materials you may already have around the house include magnetic letters, alphabet blocks, and letter tiles from board games.

Identify letters and sounds. Together, make a list of words that start with the same letter as your youngster's name. Or when you're traveling, help her look for signs with words that begin with her name's first letter. Another idea is to write your child's name vertically on a piece of paper and let her try to think of a word that begins with each letter.

Sort words. Write a different letter of the alphabet on each of 26 Styrofoam or plastic cups. Then, cut words out of newspaper or magazine headlines.

Have your child sort the words by their first letters and put them in the appropriate cups. Do some cups have a lot of words? Which cups have very

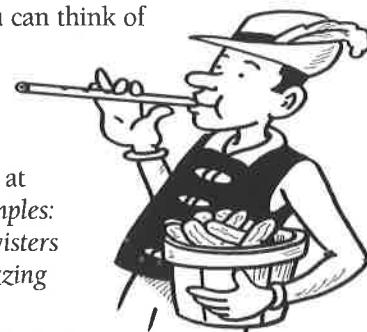


few, or none at all? Explain that some letters are more common at the beginning of words ("b," "r," "t"), and others are not as common ("q," "x," "z"). Challenge your youngster to find words beginning with uncommon letters in magazines and newspapers.

Explore sign language. Learning sign language can help your child learn letters and sounds. Visit www.deafblind.com/asl.html for drawings of the signing alphabet. Point out that some of the signs represent the written letters, such as "v" and "l." Help your youngster work on spelling her name and a few simple words. Once she has those down, she'll probably be eager to learn more.

Practice with tongue twisters. Try writing a tongue twister with your child. Pick a letter, and make a list of as many words as you can think of that start with that letter.

Together, write a sentence or two using only the words on the list. Or look for tongue twister books at the library or bookstore. *Examples: Six Sick Sheep: 101 Tongue Twisters* by Joanna Cole, and *Busy Buzzing Bumblebees and Other Tongue Twisters* by Alvin Schwartz. You can find more tongue twisters online at www.enchantedlearning.com/rhymes/Twisters.shtml.



Play alphabet memory. Fold 26 index cards in half. With your child, write an uppercase letter on one half and



its lowercase version on the other. Continue until you have all the letters of the alphabet. Cut the cards apart, put them facedown on a table, and mix them up. Take turns drawing two cards and trying to make an uppercase-lowercase match. As your youngster learns to recognize the letters, you can also talk about their sounds. Each time he turns a card over, have him name the letter, say the sound it usually makes, and think of a word that begins with it.

Make the most of mealtime. Use letter-shaped cookie cutters to cut out cookies, pancakes, cheese slices, and even mini-sandwiches. Or look for alphabet-shaped cereal, soup, noodles, or macaroni and cheese to serve your child. Have her say each letter as she eats it: “I just ate an A.”



Numbers

Sing counting songs.

Songs with numbers in their lyrics are terrific for practicing counting. Some ideas are “This Old Man” or “Five Little Monkeys.” While you’re singing, hold up the appropriate number of fingers for each verse so your youngster can see what the

numbers mean. *Tip:* You can find the words to these songs and more at http://bussongs.com/counting_songs.php.

Read counting books. Most counting books have a number on each page and a picture with that number of objects. To get the most out of these books, count the objects, pointing to each one with your finger, and have your child do the same. Try *One Hundred Hungry Ants* by Elinor J. Pinczes, *Over in the Meadow* by Ezra Jack Keats, or *Anno’s Counting Book* by Mitsumasa Anno.

Count everything! Suggest that your youngster count the number of stairs in your house, spoonfuls of yogurt as she eats, or how many times the phone rings before you can answer it. Ask her to see how few steps she can take to get from the car to the house or down the hall. When you’re standing in line or sitting in traffic, she can count the number of people or cars in front of you.

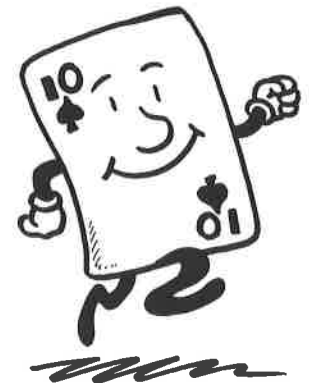
Count different ways. Help your child practice counting by having him choose a number between 1 and 10. For example, if he chooses 5, he would start at 5 and count to 10, without first saying “One, two, three, four.” Then, challenge him to count backward from 10. Teach your youngster to skip-count as well (by 2s, 5s, or 10s). To practice, pick a number and say, “Start at 6 and count by 2s.”

Point out how numbers are used. Identify the numbers on your house or mailbox, telephones, clocks, and the remote control. Encourage your child to notice numbers all around her. For example, ask her to look for a license plate with her age on it.

Play games with dice and cards. Take turns rolling two dice and adding them together. Write down the total for each roll. See who has the highest total after 10 turns.

Or play a game of cards. Have each person draw one card and turn it over. The player with the highest number keeps both cards. Continue playing until you’ve used the whole deck. The winner is the person with the most cards.

Play a number guessing game. Pick a number between 1 and 10. Have your youngster guess your number by giving him clues like “bigger,” “smaller,” “higher,” and “lower.” He will learn to put numbers in order and compare them.



Early Years