

Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

PRINT AND LETTER KNOWLEDGE

What do we mean by print and letter knowledge?

As part of print and letter knowledge, children begin to identify letters of the alphabet, including naming lower and upper case letters. Children also start to understand that words are made up of a group of letters and recognise some familiar words by sight. Print knowledge develops children's awareness of the nature and use of print. Children learn to identify parts of a book, like the front cover, title and author and develop an interest in looking at books independently.

Why is it important?

Print and letter knowledge is critical in reading and understanding the meaning of text. By knowing that letters combine to make words and understanding that print is organised in a particular way, children develop an understanding of 'words' and how the system of printed words works. Print and letter knowledge are supported through interactions with adults and other children who point out letters, words other features of print, such as book titles.

Identifying letters of the alphabet

Definition

Children learn to identify and name letters of the alphabet.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools such as plastic letters or cut out letters to help children become familiar with the shapes and names of letters
- Discuss and ask questions about the letters of the alphabet during letter games and activities
- Introduce and reinforce the names of letters by saying the letter name out loud while showing the letters in print
- Help children to recognise and name letters by supporting them to trace letters with their fingers and recreate letter shapes in different materials (e.g. sand, foam or paint)

Inspiring Ideas

- Letter Bingo! Hold up letters pulled from a bag and ask children to mark or put a counter down if they have the same letter on their bingo card. First to get a line of letters wins!
- Write a letter on a whiteboard or on a piece of paper in the centre of a table. Children can practise tracing the letter in the air with their finger, or moulding it out of playdough.
- Spread plastic letters or magnetic letters on a table or whiteboard. Describe the shape of a letter and ask children to find it for you. *“Can you find the letter that looks like a snake (S)? Can you find the letter that looks like two hills stuck together (M)?”*

Tip

As children become more confident in recognising different letter shapes, introduce a variety of letters (e.g. letters cut out of magazines, letter blocks, or magnetic letters) so children can recognise letters in different forms.

Identifying lower case and upper case letters

Children learn to identify and understand the difference between lower and upper case letters.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual displays, materials or tools such as plastic letters or cut out letters to help children become familiar with the shapes and names of lower and upper case letters
- Discuss and ask questions about the characteristics of lower and upper case letters during letter games and activities
- Introduce and reinforce the names of lower and upper case letters by naming them when you see them in print
- Help children to recognise lower and upper case letters by supporting them to trace and write with different materials (e.g. flour, sand, or foam)

Inspiring Ideas

- When reading a story, point out the capital letters in the title, comparing them to the same letter written in lower case. *“Does anyone’s name begin with ‘T’, too? Let’s write your name out! Can you see that your first letter is an upper case letter?”*
- Memory Game! Can children match an upper case letter to its lower case letter? *“You’ve found an E and an e! That’s a pair!”*
- Sorting Letters! Hold up plastic letters or magnetic letters, say the letter name and ask whether it belongs in the lower or upper case letter pile.

Tip

Discussing the first letter in children’s written name can help to reinforce the idea of upper case letters.

Understanding that print conveys meaning

Children begin to understand that print and text convey meaning, and that what we say can be communicated in writing. This includes being able to recognise their name in print and an appreciation that books tell a story using written words.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Read words out to children when you spot them in the classroom, outdoors and in books
- Use visual tools embedded in the environment, such as labels on food cartons or signs, to familiarise children with words and their meaning
- Take time to discuss and point out to children what words look like, what letters they have, and what different words mean

Inspiring Ideas

- Point out words on signs when outside. *"Look at this sign, can you see the hand? There is also a word, can you guess what it says? Yes, it says 'STOP!'"*
- I'm here! Have children 'sign in' each morning by choosing a card with their name on it, arranging magnetic letters on a whiteboard or, for older children, supporting them to write their name in a register.

Understanding print as a system

Children develop an awareness of writing and print as a system. Children learn to recognise that words are read from left to right and top to bottom in English, and that books have different parts for example, the title, author, cover, or 'The End'.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools such as posters, magnetic letters and pages of books to help children understand that words are made up of a combination of letters, both lower case and upper case
- Show how to hold and read books, flipping each page from the start of the book to the end and pointing out the direction you're reading and the way you are holding a book when reading a story
- Give children plenty of opportunities to practise holding and 'reading' books themselves
- Discuss and ask children questions about the parts of a book

Inspiring Ideas

- When reading a story, point out the author and illustrator's names and read the title out loud. *"What does the title tell us about the story? Can you guess what the story will be about?"*
- Track words with your finger when reading a story to show children what reading looks like. Point out that you're reading the words from left to right and top to bottom. See if children can move their fingers along the text as you read.
- Awesome Authors! Support children to make their own book, showing them where to add their name as the author, talking about what the front cover tells us about a book, and adding page numbers to their drawing or writing.