

Letter, Sounds and Word Activities

Matching activities - children need to be able to match simple things before they can move onto complicated letter matching! Matching things that are the same whether that be toys, pictures, shapes etc. are all beginning steps to matching letters and words. Playing games like snap with simple picture cards or making piles of things that are the same are good fun ways to do this. Match cars, blocks, beads, pegs, socks anything you have that you can match same and different. You can make a sandwich or a pizza or a sweetie plate, decorating with items to see if you can make two the same.

Pattern activities – Pattern requires good matching skills, plus a bit more attention to detail. You can use toys like Lego to build a simple tower with, for example 4 coloured blocks, and see if your child can make the same. Change the pattern, get your child to make their own pattern and copy it. You can make a pattern with coloured pegs or counters or anything else you can find. Start simply and then you can build on it.

Sorting activities – sorting helps children work out differences and similarities in objects. This leads on to being able to tell the difference between letters, words etc. You could use different coloured objects e.g. blocks or counters or beads and sort into piles of the same colour. You could use different shaped pasta and sort into shapes. You could use different sized objects like long and short or big and small or more complicated – 3 sizes. You could look for markings or shapes which make things similar or different – sorting buttons into ones with two holes and ones with four. Anything you can use to make sets of similar items together.

Name activities – Showing children their name, see if they can find their name amongst other words. Can they find other letters which are the same as ones in their name? Some children may be able to build their name with letter cards or blocks with letters. Your child may be recognising logos, words and letters all around them. If your child shows an interest in a letter for example the first letter of their name, tell them the name of the letter e.g. that is the letter S, it makes the sound sssss. You could see if you can find other words which start with the same letter.

Having letters available to play with – children learn lots through play, just having some letters to play with, children will learn lots on their own about the different shapes etc. If you are buying letters choose the lowercase ones first. You don't have to buy them though, you could write letters on cards or stick them onto blocks or cars or anything else you have available. Children naturally enjoy matching and sorting letters. If your child is interested you can talk about the different names and sounds of the letters e.g. that is the letter M it makes the sound mmmm. Don't force your child to learn the letters, they will learn much better through natural play and talk.

When you are out and about encourage your child to look at signs and logos. Children very quickly become familiar with the signs for Tesco, Asda, McDonalds etc. encourage them to look for lots of different signs to "read." Your child may be interested in finding similar letters in these signs. Remember if your child shows an interest in a letter call it by its name and tell the sound it makes. That's the letter T it makes the sound t-t (repeat the soft sound).

Cookie cutter letters – these days you can buy letter cookie cutters cheaply from places like Poundland, BM Bargain, Tesco etc. You can do lots of different things with these. You can of course make cookies, or play with them with playdough, you can stamp the letter on to bread to make alphabet toast, or use them to cut cheese letters, you can use them as stencils to draw around, or as stampers to dip in paint and stamp with (just be sure to clean them properly).

Egg box or muffin tin game. You can stick or write letters, or colours or numbers, or whatever you are encouraging your child to learn into egg box, or muffin tin sections. The children can then play at trying to throw, or flip coins or counters into the different sections and see if they can say which section they have landed in e.g. "I've landed on red or I've landed in ffff." A good tip is to start with things the child knows already and just add new things one at a time. So I might put all the colours in because they know them and then the letter from their name plus maybe a new one e.g. m for mum, that way it is fun and not too hard.

When reading books with children they may identify certain words or letters like "that is my letter", when they see the first letter of their name

or they may begin to recognise words e.g. title words like “Gruffalo”. Praise your child for identifying these things and see if they can spy any other times that letter or word is found.

Erasing letters – if you have a chalkboard or a whiteboard. You can write letters and children have fun using their finger to erase out the letter you had written. Or in nicer weather you can use pavement chalk and get children to use a water gun or squirter to try and follow and erase the letters. You can also just play a target game calling out letters for children to hit with the water gun.

I Spy – I spy is a great game to play to help children think about the initial sounds in words. You can play it anywhere and is a great game to play when children are getting bored on a long car journey. Just remember to use the sound not the letter name e.g. I spy with my little eye something beginning with ffff (not F – eff).