



## Getting Ready for Kindergarten: Exploring Letters and Sounds



Children need lots of opportunities to explore letters and letter sounds to become good readers and writers. This type of learning is called **alphabet knowledge**. Children develop alphabet knowledge when they have meaningful experiences with printed words.

There's no need for flashcards or fancy computer programs. The best way to help young children learn about the alphabet is by playing with and talking about letters, sounds and words during everyday experiences. An alphabet knowledge activity can be as short and simple as "Look, there's an "M". M makes a "mmmmm" sound, like in mmmmom."

### The activities in this handout support the following Lincoln County Schools Kindergarten Readiness Skills:

- I can recognize 11 upper or lower case letters.
- I can produce the sound for 11 letters.
- I can tell the difference between numbers and letters.
- I can recognize and write my own name.
- I can make and recognize rhymes.

### Here are some ways to help your child learn about letters and sounds.

#### Support your child's visual and hearing skills.

Children need strong visual skills in order to recognize individual letters and read words.

Activities that support visual skills include:

- Playing with puzzles and blocks
- Finding and naming objects
- Looking for details or hidden items in pictures
- Playing matching games (like Lotto and Concentration)

Children need strong hearing skills in order to recognize letter sounds and the sounds in words.

Support your child's hearing skills by:

- Talking about every day sounds in the environment (animals, machines, music, etc.)
- Sharing songs, poems and fingerplays
- Talking about rhyming words, such as "Cat, hat – that rhymes!" ( Try books by Dr. Seuss!)

#### Start with the letters in your child's name.

*Note: When writing names, use upper case for the first letter and lower case for the rest of the letters.*

- Look for meaningful places to write or display your child's name such as
  - On toys, clothes, belongings or family photos
  - On things your child makes or draws
  - At your child's seat at the table or in the car
- Help your child connect with his/her written name. For instance, you could say "Here's your backpack. I know it's yours because it says 'Braden' right here."
- Introduce the letters in your child's name.
  - Talk about the first letter: its name, its shape and the sound it makes.
  - Help your child notice that letter in different places (books, cereal boxes, signs, etc.)
  - Help your child find things that start with the same letter and sound as his/her name.
  - Gradually introduce the rest of the letters in your child's name in the same way.
- As your child becomes familiar with her/his own name, he/she will often be interested in other people's names. Help your child explore the letters and sounds in the names of family members and friends.

#### Help your child notice letters, words and sounds.

- Talk about the letters/words your child sees on toys, signs or other objects.
- Have a "Letter Hunt". Together, look for a certain letter in a book, around your home or on signs.

- Help your child collect and organize things that start with different letters or sounds.
- Play an alphabet version of "I Spy." For instance: "I spy something that starts with **t** like **t**urtle."
- Explain that numbers are different from letters – numbers represent how many things we see/count.

### Make alphabet play and learning hands on and active.

- Let your child explore magnetic letters, alphabet puzzles or letters cut out of cardboard or sandpaper.
- Help your child make letters with playdough or make letter-shaped cookies or pizza.
- Use chalk to make a giant letter on a playground, sidewalk or in the sand on the beach. Encourage your child to walk, run, or drive a toy along the letter.
- Try creating or imitating the shape of a letter with your bodies.
- Encourage your child to "build" letters using blocks or other construction type toys.



### Help your child get ready to write.

- Encourage your child to use crayons, markers, pencils, paint brushes, etc. This helps develop finger strength and control.
- Let your child see you writing things down. Talk about the letters and words as you write them.
- When children first start to write they usually use scribbles, lines or marks. As your child gains experience, you'll start to see letter-like shapes and actual letters. Accept and encourage these early efforts!
- Some children like to write their own names. Remember that your child's name may look like a scribble at first but will get more recognizable with experience and encouragement.
- Some children want you to write for them or want help. That's okay! You can...
  - Let you child watch as you write. Talk about and describe the letters.
  - Have your child put a hand on yours as you write.
  - Offer to guide your child's hand as you make the letters together.
  - Write the name lightly and let your child trace it.
  - Encourage your child to copy his/her name from an example you make.