

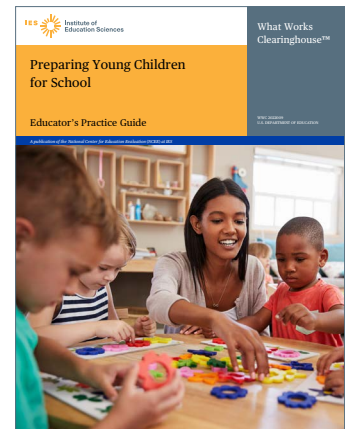
Recommendation 6: Build children's knowledge of letters and sounds

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Exploring and identifying the sounds of language is important for developing literacy. Awareness of the sounds of language, also referred to as phonological awareness, is essential for helping children begin to understand that words are made of sounds, and that when blended, those sounds make words. Teachers can help children learn to listen for sounds and connect them to the letters they see. With practice and repetition, children will be able to recognize many letters and identify some of the sounds those letters make.

This recommendation from the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide *Preparing Young Children for School* provides four steps for building children's early understanding of letters and the sounds they make. The first step helps children understand that words are made up of different sounds. The next two steps introduce the letters and their sounds and intentionally plan time for children to practice their letter knowledge. The final step involves finding ways for children and teachers to discuss letters and sounds in words throughout the day.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. **Initially focus on listening for sounds in words.** Children may need an introduction to the idea that words are made up of different sounds. Teachers can point out that words are made up of sounds and help children listen for different sounds in words. Explain that some words start with the same sound, and some words have the same last sound, such as /t/ in *part*, *sit*, and *boot*. Tell children to listen for words that share the same beginning or end sound in a song, book, or poem or with words that rhyme. Continue to point out sounds in words or to ask children what sounds they hear, when the opportunity arises.
2. **Intentionally introduce a new letter and its sound.** Intentionally plan time during small-group or center activities or during shared book reading to introduce a letter and the sound it makes. Start with letters and sounds children are familiar with, then add on other letters and sounds. When introducing a letter, clearly explain the letter name and the sound the letter makes. Show children how to write the target letter. For letters that have more than one sound, explain that some letters make more than one sound, and tell children the sounds.
3. **Use materials and activities that allow children to practice identifying letters and their corresponding sounds.** Children need multiple and repeated exposures to letters and the sounds they make. Carefully choose engaging and hands-on activities and materials that can be used during small-group or whole-class activities or centers throughout the week to provide children with practice identifying and discussing the target letters and sounds. Be sure to include previously learned letters for children to review.
4. **Include print throughout the classroom to provide additional opportunities to discuss letters and their sounds.** Making print a regular part of the classroom will not only help familiarize children with letters, but also provide multiple opportunities for teachers to discuss letters and the sounds they make. Use labels throughout the classroom, write out the daily schedule for children to see, and display children's names throughout the classroom. Use natural opportunities that arise when referring to print in the classroom, to discuss letters and the sounds they make.