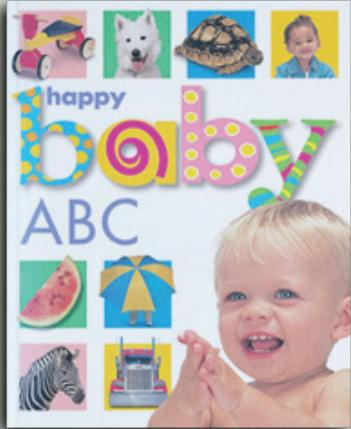


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...



Building Letter-Sound Awareness in Preschoolers with Alphabet Books

In order to read on their own, children need to learn that the letters on the page represent specific sounds. For example, children need to learn that the sound /b/ goes with the letter B. This is called "letter-sound knowledge."

Letter-sound knowledge is not easy for children to learn, especially in English, which has 44 sounds but only 26 letters in the alphabet. This means that some letters stand for several different sounds. For example, the letter C can make three different sounds: the sound /s/ as in "ceiling," the sound /k/ as in "cake" and combined with the letter H, it makes the sound /ch/ as in "chin". No wonder it can take preschool-aged children **two to three years** to be able to accurately match all the letters and sounds!

The Four S's – which stand for **Show, Say, Sound** and **Stress** – is a strategy you can use to help expose your preschooler to letter-sound knowledge while reading books and at other times throughout the day.

My chosen book:

Happy Baby ABC by Sarah Kappely

Why I picked it:

This book has an engaging storyline, clear pictures and presents print in a variety of ways – some words are written in a larger font, to show that they are louder words, some words are bolded for emphasis, and the characters' speech is written in speech balloons. The print really sticks out!

Why I picked it:

Although many books offer opportunities for talking about letters and sounds, alphabet books work particularly well because:

- They don't usually have a storyline, so you won't be interrupting the flow of the story to talk about letters and sounds. *Happy Baby ABC* is an example of a book without a storyline.
- They often include a number of words on each page that start with the same letter and sound. For example, in *Happy Baby ABC*, the page for the letter D has labeled pictures of a dog, a doll and a dolphin.

I like *Happy Baby ABC* because most of the items pictured are interesting and relevant to children. It contains many pictures of animals, toys, foods, and household items that would be familiar to most children.

Using the Four S's

Here's how to use the Four S's with *Happy Baby ABC*:

- **Show the letter** - point to the letter to help your child recognize what it looks like. Talk mainly about the first letter in a word since these letters are more obvious. If you're reading *Happy Baby ABC*, you could point to the letter D in the word "dog".
- **Say the letter's name** - tell your child what the letter is called to help him learn its name. You could say "D is the first letter in 'dog'."
- **Sound out what the letter says** - make the letter's sound to help him understand the difference between the name of the letter and the sound it represents. Here you might say, "D makes the sound /d/ in 'dog'."
- **Stress the sound:** In this case you might say "Listen...d-d-dog!"

How you stress the sound depends on the letter:

- The sounds /p, b, t, d, k, and g/ can be stressed by repeating them three times (e.g. d-d-dog)
- All other sounds can be stressed by stretching out the first sound in the word (e.g. mmmmonkey)

Once you've completed the Four S's with a specific letter, you can then find another word that starts with the same letter and makes the same sound. In *Happy Baby ABC*, you might start by pointing to one of the other pictures on the same page – "Listen, doll also starts with the letter D and makes the sound /d/, d-d-doll."

Start using the Four S's with letters that consistently make the same sound. For example, the letter D always makes the sound /d/ at the beginning of words, and the Letter N almost always makes the sound /n/. The consistency of these letter sounds will make it easier for your child to make the letter-sound connection.

Tricky letters:

Some letters are more challenging because they can make different sounds in different words. The letters A, C, E, G, I, K, O, P, S, T, U and X all have multiple sounds associated with them. For example, the word "shovel" starts with the letter S but when it is combined with the letter H, it makes the sound /sh/, not /s/.

If you come across one of these difficult letters, talk to your child about it. You could say, "Sometimes the letter S makes a different sound, depending on the word." Don't expect your child to remember all of these exceptions, just point them out to help him become aware of them.

Once your child is familiar with the strategy:

It can take a while for your child to be able to match letters and sounds on his own. The object of this strategy is to help expose children to letter-sound knowledge, and to make thinking about this link a fun activity. If your child seems interested, and you've exposed him to this strategy many times, you can start to wait and see if your child can think of another word that starts with the same sound and letter.

In *Happy Baby ABC*, you might point to the letter B in the word "baby" and say "B is the first letter in 'baby'. B makes the sound /b/ in 'baby'. Listen... B-b-baby. Can you think of another word that starts with the letter B and makes the sound /b/?" At first, your child will need you to help him think of another word, but eventually, he will be able to think of words on his own.

If your child chooses a word that starts with a different letter or sound, use this as an opportunity to increase his knowledge of letters and sounds. For example, if your child says "'towel' starts with the letter B," you could say, "Let's think about that. Towel? Towel starts with the sound /t/ like in t-t-towel. So, towel starts with the letter T that makes the /t/ sound. Let's see if we can think of a word that starts with the letter B and makes the /b/ sound." Remember, we aren't expecting your preschooler to master this skill – we want them to have fun thinking about how letters and sounds correspond.

The Four S's throughout the day:

We have been talking about using the Four S's in books, but you can also use them throughout the day! When you think about it, print is all around us, not just in books, so there are many opportunities to help your child gain letter-sound knowledge.

For example, you could talk about the letters and sounds in the printed words:

- on a milk carton or cereal box at the breakfast table
- in the instructions when playing a board game
- on your child's clothing when dressing
- on the signs you see while on a walk

The more frequently you use the Four S's, the greater your child's letter-sound knowledge will be.

I hope you enjoyed this Book Nook topic. I'd love to hear which books you use to build sound awareness. Please send me your feedback.



A little more about me

I'm a Speech-Language Pathologist working at The Hanen Centre as a Program Specialist. I combine my background in language and literacy development with my knowledge of adult learning to offer evidence-based face to face and online trainings to early childhood educators, SLPs and parents.

The Book Nook combines my passion for children's literature with my knowledge of language and literacy development. I hope you enjoy it!

Tamara