

Stick With It: Magnetic Letter Fun

Here are a few activities to try with a cookie sheet and some magnetic letters. You can use commercially produced magnets, or make your own using cardstock and an adhesive magnetic background: remember that you will often need multiples of some letters, particularly vowels, in order to practice things like spelling first and last names.

1. Print your child's name on a piece of paper. Have your child pick out magnetic letters (and name the letters as he/she finds them) to "build" his/her name. Remember to use uppercase for the starting letter of his/her name! He/She can place the letters on top of your printing, or underneath them. Take care to point out the proper positioning of the letters (*"We start from the left end and put our letters to the right. And look, the "e" in your name faces this way, just like how we printed it first."*)

You can also encourage your child to spell out his/her name with a crayon, first by tracing your letters, and then by copying them underneath. Then, ask your child to match the magnetic letters in his/her name to his/her own printed version—have him/her read the letters aloud as they are placed in order.

2. Spell out your child's name with the magnetic letters, but omit one letter. Can you child find/tell you what letter is missing, and put it in its proper place? If your child is already familiar with the letters in his/her name, spell out your child's name but reverse the order of the first and last letters (ie., NEVIK instead of KEVIN). Then encourage your child to find what's wrong and "fix it." (*"What's the first letter of your name? K? Well, where's the K? Oops, there it is! Where should it really go?"*)

3. Sing the Alphabet Song while pointing to the letters. Sing the song backwards while moving through the letters as well. Or, mix up your alphabet letters, then sing the song while choosing which letter corresponds with the Alphabet Song. Then, sing the letters in your child's name while pointing to the letters as well. Other "spelling songs" are great ways to match letters, as well. (A terrific one is The "Chicken Song," found on the *Wee Sing* series of kids music.)

C, that's the way we begin;
H, is the next letter in;
I, that is the third;
C, we've already heard;
K, now that letter's our friend;
E, now we're nearing the end;
C, H, I, C, K, E, N, that is the way to spell chicken!
C, H, I, C, K, E, N!

4. Plan a household scavenger hunt to find the letters. Hide letters of the alphabet on magnetic surfaces around the house (file cabinet, fridge, stove, washer, dryer, garbage can, step stool, chairs, heat vents, etc.). Play find the letter: tell your child *"I'm looking for the letter A. Can you find it in the house?"* If your child is just beginning to familiarize him/herself with the alphabet, have a print version of the alphabet to show (*"See, this is what the A looks like. Do you think you can find it somewhere?"*)
5. Fish for letters: print the letters of the alphabet on separate cards or pieces of paper or cardboard. Place the printed alphabet letters in a bowl, or "fish tank." Have your child "fish" for a letter, and then agree on what the letter is. Then, have your child find the matching magnetic letter to make a match. If a match is made, set the match aside—cards that aren't matched correctly go back into the fishbowl for another turn. To familiarize your child with both upper and lower case letters, use both sets of magnetic letters, and encourage him or her to fish both letters out. You can also use upper case cards to match with the lower case magnetic letters, or vice versa.
6. Family names: using photos or drawn pictures of family members, spell out the names of brothers, sisters, pets, or other special people, either by using magnetic letters, or by using letters printed on cardboard pieces. Remember to use upper case cards or letters to start each name. Your child can use the photo clues to "read" each name. Have your child identify each letter aloud—you can also mix up the letters--and child "spell" that word (mom, dad, Nana, Timmy, Jody, Fido, etc.)

It can be a challenge to encourage your child to spell his/her name at first using both sets of the magnetic letters, as upper case and lower case letters might be a new concept to him or her. Don't worry: the more you play with the letters together, the more comfortable your child will be with the "different" looks of both upper and lower cases.