

Labeling Pictures Letter by Letter

Targeted skill

Young children are expected to learn phonics, an essential part of learning to read.

Materials

- ◆ drawing paper
- ◆ crayons or markers

What to do

You and your child begin by each drawing your own picture. Then model labeling different objects in your picture. If, for example, you've drawn a typical "house with tree" picture, say, "I am going to write a label for my house." Say "house" very slowly, emphasizing each letter sound. It might sound like /h/ /au/ /s/. After saying the word a couple of times, say /h/ and write an "h" beside the house, then say /au/ and write an "o" after the "h," then say /s/ and write an "s" after the "o." Decide to label something else in the picture, perhaps a flower. The letters you write might be "flr." In this activity, it is important to write only the letters for the sounds you emphasize, or hear. This is called "phonetic spelling." This is not the time to emphasize correct spelling.

After you've written a couple of labels, encourage your child to identify and label something on his or her picture. Repeat the word your child says, saying it very slowly. For example, say /k/ /a/ /t/, for *cat*. In this word, each of the letters can be clearly heard. That is not always true. Don't try to make your child "hear" something that he or she really doesn't hear. Some children write only the first letter of each word, while others hear only the first and last sounds. These are natural stages, and children will progress to hearing most of the sounds in a word in time.

Extending the activity

Encourage your child to use phonetic spelling to write lots of things: grocery lists, thank-you notes, reminders, notes to family members, and so on.

What your child is practicing

Most of the time when adults think of phonics, they think of "sounding out" unknown words when reading. Teachers call this decoding, or figuring out an unknown word by using letter-sound correspondence. This activity is really *encoding*. Your child is writing the letters that represent the sounds he or she is saying aloud.