

Simple day to day activities to help your preschooler develop

Mathematics Concepts

You are your child's first teacher, and the good news is that you don't need flash cards, special equipment, or an education degree to teach him/her many mathematical concepts. Simply by narrating and including your child in what you are doing throughout the day you can expose your young children to these concepts as a natural part of parenting. As your child develops over time, continued exposure will lead to understanding.

Concept: "Number" means how many –

Ways to help your child develop this concept- As you go about your day, use "number talk" to describe what you are doing, "Oops, I need three stamps, but I only have two. I need one more, so we need to buy some" or "This recipe calls for four eggs. Let's count them as I crack them into the bowl. One, two, three ..." At first children will only parrot the words, but eventually they will come to have an understanding that different numbers signify different amounts.

Concept: One-to-one correspondence –This is the ability to match one object or word to another object.

*Ways to help your child learn this concept as he/she grows-*The important thing for children to do in order to internalize this concept is to begin by touching each item as they say a number. Children learn by imitation, so demonstrate this early and often. As you dress your toddler, and he puts his arm through the sleeve say, "I see one hand." When the next one comes through, say "That makes two hands!" Kiss each little hand as you say, "One(kiss), two(kiss).

As you put goldfish or other snacks on a tray or in a bowl, point to each as you count them.

Allow your child to help you cook by helping you count the cups or spoonfuls you use as you follow a recipe.

Have your child set the table – Counting the number of placemats; then counting out that number of forks, spoons, napkins, etc. and placing the right number on the mat.

Encourage your child to count everything – toys, food, people, rocks, whatever is available, touching each item as he/she says the number. This is a great "waiting game", in a restaurant, at the doctor's office, etc. Have your child close his/her eyes while you change the number of items to count again.

Concept: Classifying into sets. A "set" is a group with the same characteristics.

How to help your child learn this concept – Show your child how to sort toys, socks, blocks, etc. by one characteristic such as color, size or shape. When that is mastered you can move on to sorting by more than one characteristic, "Put all of the big red blocks in this box and all of the small red blocks in this one." A great way to make a game of cleaning up!

Another way to classify is by naming things that have a similar characteristic, “How many things can you think of that you could ride on, that fly, that are red, etc.” This is another good waiting game.

Concept: Estimating means making an educated guess about how many.

How to help your child learn this concept – Hypothesize and then test, “I wonder if this present will fit in this box. Let’s try it and see.” “Do you think there are enough muffins for everyone to have one?” “How many apples do you think we can get in this bowl?”

Concept: Recognizing and creating patterns

How to help your child learn this concept- Call attention to patterns in the environment. Create patterns with everyday objects (checkers, rocks and sticks, cheese and crackers, forks and spoons- anything that comes in different shapes and /or colors, or you can draw your own on paper - “XXOOXXOO”). Ask your child to guess what comes next.

This works with physical movement too – Clap, clap, turn around, stomp, clap, clap, turn around, stomp...

Concept: Geometric shapes

*How to help your child learn this concept*_Point out shapes in the environment. Dinner plates, road signs, picture frames, buttons on the remote, all come in varying shapes. Have a shape scavenger hunt right in your home.

Concept: Recognizing printed numbers

How to help your child learn this concept- There are lots of great counting books you can use to familiarize your child with how numbers look. Children love to “read” these books because they can count the items on the page for themselves and then see the number in print.

A little advice: Keep it fun and unpressured. If your child isn’t interested in participating in any of these activities, leave it alone for awhile. There is plenty of time to learn these concepts. The thing you definitely do not want is to create the kind of math anxiety that cripples so many of us. One fun idea you might try is to have a regular family game night where children can learn math by counting moves on a board or spots on dice, etc. With younger children it works well to work in teams.