



How Can We Help Children Learn Math Skills?

By Renee McLaughlin

We read to our preschool children, help them learn the letters of the alphabet, and encourage them to print their names. What can we do to help preschool children build a foundation for learning and math? Just as with reading and writing, math needs to be learned in concrete ways to build a solid foundation before children can be expected to learn abstract concepts which happen later in their development.

It is important to develop number concepts at an early age, which will lead to positive attitudes about math. Math is all around us, and children recognize this because they are always asking “how much,” “how big,” “how many,” “how far”, and “how much longer”? It is the role of all adults who interact with children to help them discover the answers to these questions in ways that they can understand.

Children need to develop experiences in counting, number recognition, measuring, comparing quantities, and shapes. This can be accomplished using many everyday items and simple standard toys. Toys like blocks, shape sorters, building sets, and puzzles promote math skills in a tangible way for children.

Using everyday activities to bring math into children’s lives through sorting and patterning is a great way to promote math development. Preschool children learn about one-to-one correspondence when they set the table and put one knife, one fork, one plate and one napkin out for each person. Count with children, when they go outside for gross motor play and again when they come in, when they climb stairs, or when they put out snack items. Help them count the number of girls and boys in the class. Geometric shapes are an important concept in math. A classroom has many opportunities to promote shape learning such as, finding the triangles, rectangles, or circles in the room.

Let’s not forget about the many songs that have numbers in them and books that often connect numbers to the illustrations on the page. Cooking is not only a science activity but a math activity as well. These activities give children the opportunity to compare and measure quantities.

Sensitizing children to numbers is a skill that will create an atmosphere for children to explore mathematical situations on their own. Teachers can facilitate this learning by naming objects and people whenever appropriate. An example of this would be, “I see we have four people in the block area. How many people can play in this area?”

Make math fun and use it in practical situations everyday. Incorporate math concepts into your lesson plans and make learning fun!

Resources:

Sarama, Julie, Clements, Douglas. (2006). *How Children Learn about NUMBERS*. Scholastic Early Childhood Today. New York.
Today’s Parent. (1996). *Preschool math (From 3 to 5)*. Vol.13, Iss.8; pg.124.