



Increase your child's math awareness with daily activities

Early childhood is a great time to show your child that math is not only fun, it's a natural part of his daily life, too. Nearly everything your child does involves math. Each time he gets dressed, for example, he follows a sequence. That's a key math skill.

Here are some other natural ways to help your child become aware of the math around him:

- **Look for numbers.** Search together for numbers your child knows. If he doesn't recognize numbers yet, point them out on occasion. "That big sign has a 2 and a 5 on it!"
- **Estimate.** Say to your child, "I think you can finish your toast in 10 bites. Let's see." Then help him count his bites.
- **Look for patterns.** Help your child find patterns on sheets, curtains or clothing. "Your shirt has a red stripe, then a yellow stripe, then a red stripe. That's a pattern."
- **Have a "shape of the day."** In the morning, show your child a shape. "Look at your plate. The shape of your plate is a circle. We're going to have a circle hunt today!" Throughout the day, point out circles where you see them. Praise your child when he points one out.
- **Sequence.** Preschool children love daily routines and knowing what's going to happen next. Talk about the course of the day. "First, I'll drop you off at preschool. After preschool is over, grandma will pick you up. Then, you will go back to her house to play."

Pretending to read builds reading skills!



Children love to be read to. But they love it even more when *they* read to you. Although most preschoolers aren't able to read just yet, they can pretend!

Pretending to read helps preschoolers build recall skills, language and confidence—key elements of reading readiness.

To encourage pretend reading, follow these steps:

1. **Find a book** that features simple pictures and contains text with rhythm and rhyme.
2. **Reread the book often.** Your child will likely memorize all or parts of the book.
3. **Pause while you're reading.** Point to a picture. Ask your child to tell you what it is.
4. **Stop before you say a word or phrase**—perhaps one that repeats or rhymes. See if your child can fill in the word.
5. **Omit more words and phrases** until your child is telling the story.
6. **Ask your child to "read" the story to you.** Help as needed. Remember, your child isn't really reading, so don't insist she say the exact words.

Encourage your preschooler to talk about ideas and actions



When your child begins school, his teacher will want him to talk about his thoughts, ideas and experiences. This kind of communication is a very important part of preschool and kindergarten.

To build communication skills:

- **Get the story** behind your child's drawings. When your child draws a picture, ask him to tell you about it. Then write his description underneath his drawing.
- **Talk about your day** with your child. Say more than, "We're going out." Instead, try, "We are going to the store this afternoon. I need to get some fruit and a box of cereal. You can help me pick them out."
- **Help your child tell a story** in sequence. This helps him learn that one event follows another. For example, ask him, "What are some of the things you do *after* dinner and *before* bed?" If he's

not sure, say, "You brush your teeth. Then what do you do?"

- **Encourage your child** to provide details. If he tells you that he went out to the playground with his class, ask questions that will help him recall more of that experience. "Did you like playing on the swings or on the monkey bars more?" "Who was playing with you on the playground?"

Source: N. Gardner-Neblett and K.C. Gallagher, *More Than Baby Talk: 10 Ways to Promote the Language and Communication Skills of Infants and Toddlers*, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute, niswc.com/ec-babytalk.

"Early language and communication skills are crucial for children's success in school and beyond."

—Nicole Gardner-Neblett

Use your preschooler's name to strengthen writing skills



There is one word your child will probably hear, read and write every day throughout life—her name! Why not use your child's name to increase her reading readiness? Here's how:

- **Label household items** with your child's name, such as her coat hook, toys and bedroom door. Capitalize only the first letter.
- **Write in creative ways.** Let your child trace the letters in her name on paper. She could write letters in sand using her finger or a stick. She could even try to make letters out of dough!
- **Give your child fun challenges.** Write her name on two index cards. Cut one of the cards into four pieces. Can she put it back together to make her name? Also mix up paper letters. Can your child use them to form her name?
- **Play name games.** Clap the syllables of your child's name. ("Sar-ah Pear-son.") Rhyme it with other sounds. ("Sarah Darah!") Do a cheer. ("Gimme an S!")
- **Show your child** how to write her name on a piece of paper. Talk about each letter and the sound it makes. She can try writing it when she's ready.

Are you raising a preschooler who is eager to learn?



Children are born with a desire to explore their world. They are curious, and it is important that they remain so if they are to succeed in school.

Are you keeping your preschooler's natural curiosity alive? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you model curiosity** by wondering about things out loud?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage your child** to ask questions? When she does, say, "That's a good question!"
- ___ **3. Do you give your child** things she can explore, take apart and put back together?
- ___ **4. Do you help your child** use a small magnifying glass to examine things—bugs, flowers, newsprint, walls, carpet, dirt?
- ___ **5. Do you take "adventure walks"** with your child to see how many new things you can find?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you're keeping your preschooler's spirit of investigation and wonder active. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Show your preschooler how a good sense of humor is helpful



If your family gets stuck in the rain, instead of complaining, try a little humor: “This is like a shower! Too bad we don’t have shampoo!” Then scrub your head and laugh.

Kidding around teaches your preschooler that humor can relieve frustration—and can even make challenges fun! Humor also makes good times even better.

A good sense of humor can help your child:

- **Join in activities.** This yields other benefits, such as getting comfortable in social situations and improving social skills.

- **Get positive reactions from peers.** When children think someone is funny, they may choose to spend extra time with that person.
- **Handle tough social situations.** When someone is frustrated or angry, humor can ease the tension and stress.
- **Be creative.** To develop a sense of humor, kids must come up with unusual ways of doing, saying or seeing things.
- **Succeed in school.** Many school activities use humor to boost learning, including telling stories and reading Dr. Seuss books!

Source: L. Kutner, Ph.D., “Humor As a Key to Child Development,” PsychCentral, nswc.com/ec-humor.

Develop your child’s thinking skills with questions and toys



Your preschooler is experiencing amazing brain development in these early years. The extent of growth depends in part on how much nurturing her young brain receives.

One way to promote this development is to help your child learn to think for herself. Here are some activities that will help you build your preschooler’s thinking skills:

- **Encourage your child** to ask questions. Young children usually ask many questions, and sometimes it can try a parent’s patience. But remember that the more questions your child asks, the more she learns. And the more she learns, the more she continues to think.
- **Ask questions yourself.** Avoid questions that have one-word answers, such as “Did you have fun today?” Instead, ask, “Can you tell me about the fort you built with Amy?” “What do you think the two of you will play tomorrow?”
- **Give your child time to process.** Young children may not be able to form their responses as quickly as older children or adults can. After you ask a question, be sure to wait a moment or two to allow your child to think of what she wants to say.
- **Choose toys carefully.** Electronic toys are fun, but watch out for those that seem to do all the playing, while your child just sits and watches. Classic toys such as blocks, puzzles, toy vehicles and animal figures are often the best for encouraging creative play and thinking.

Q: My son, who just turned five, loves his sleep! Preschool starts at 9:00 a.m. and we have been late many mornings. We have even missed some days because it is so hard to get him out of bed. Can you give me tips for helping him get up and out?

Questions & Answers

A: You’re right to be concerned. Regular attendance is absolutely necessary for school success, and attendance habits begin in preschool. Research shows that children who attend preschool regularly show more growth in literacy skills than those who are frequently absent.

To promote good attendance and make your mornings easier:

- **Make sure your son** is getting enough sleep. Children this age need at least 11 hours of sleep each night to be at their best. Try getting him to bed by 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. Do this for a week and you may be surprised at how much easier it becomes to wake him up in the morning.
- **Adjust your routines** in the evenings and mornings. Prepare the night before school. Pack your child’s backpack and have it by the door. Set his clothes out for the next day. Have all breakfast foods that don’t need refrigeration on the table. These advance steps can save you 30 minutes or more. Remember that preschoolers love to dawdle, so include a little extra time in the morning. If your child gets ready early, reward him with a quick story. That may be all the motivation he needs to move a little faster!

The Kindergarten Experience

Attendance is a high priority for kindergartners



Studies show that attendance rates for kindergartners are lower than for students in later school grades.

Yet regular attendance in kindergarten is critical for your child's school success.

It's important to instill the value and habit of attending school regularly in the early elementary years. Being in school every day will enable your child to do well.

Here's how to help your child achieve excellent attendance:

- **Let your child know** that you expect him to go to school every day. If you tell him it's important to you, it will be important to him.
- **Remain calm** if your child balks at going to school one day. This is normal for kindergartners. Don't discuss it or raise your voice. Just tell him he must go. It's a rule.
- **Keep your child home** if he's sick—especially if the illness is contagious. Simply not feeling like going to school, however, isn't a good reason to stay home.
- **Schedule doctors' appointments** outside of school hours.
- **Schedule family vacations** during school breaks.

It's also important to develop the habit of getting to school on time. If your child arrives late, he might miss something important. Late arrival also disrupts the whole class. So be sure your child gets to school before the bell rings.

What will your child learn in kindergarten this year?

As a parent of a kindergartner, you may wonder what your child will be learning this year. Every class is unique, but generally kindergartners learn about:

- **Words and reading.** Students are surrounded by words and books. By summer, many kids are reading. Kindergartners also build writing skills. Your child may keep a journal—even if it only contains scribbles and pictures. This shows that writing is a way to communicate.
- **Math.** Kindergartners practice using numbers in many ways. Clocks, calendars, rulers and other items make it fun.
- **Science.** Kids love learning how the world works. In kindergarten, they study weather, plants and animals. They put things into



groups, such as sea and land animals. Your child's class may have cooking activities or they may try growing plants from seeds.

- **Social studies.** It's exciting to learn about history and cultures. For example, "What rules do people follow? Why?" Students learn a lot about getting along with others. This makes school—and life—much easier!

Find different ways to connect with the kindergarten teacher



During preschool, it's common for parents to chat with teachers when dropping kids off or while volunteering. In kindergarten, however, your child may ride the bus and the teacher may have limited volunteer opportunities.

Here are some other ways to connect with your child's teacher:

- **Attend parent events.** The year will probably start with an open house. Be there to meet the staff and learn about your child's class.
- **Schedule conferences.** Make the most of one-on-one time with the teacher. Bring a list of topics you'd like to discuss.
- **Keep an open mind.** If the teacher mentions areas in which your child needs improvement, try not to be defensive. You and the school are on the same "team."
- **Stay in touch.** Tell the school about changes that affect your child, such as a divorce or move. Ask the teacher to tell you about progress, setbacks and ways you can help at home.