



Early Math Teaches More Than Just Numbers

Early exposure to numbers—much like early exposure to words—gives children an important foundation for success in school and in life. Counting with young children increases their “numeracy,” just as reading to young children improves their literacy.

But numeracy means much more than just knowing how to count. Basic number sense helps children recognize patterns, identify quantities and learn shapes. These skills translate into everyday tasks like counting out change, telling time or reading recipes. Young children who are taught numeracy learn to see numerical value in the world around them. And it appears that children who have the strongest number sense in kindergarten do best in other subjects in school later on.

Children who begin elementary school without basic math concepts struggle to understand math as they age. In fact, recent research has shown that children who begin first grade with a numeracy gap have a hard time catching up to their peers.

New studies show that a sense of numbers and quantities starts to develop very early in life. Babies and toddlers begin to learn early mathematical concepts from conversations and interactions with their parents and caregivers. Much like learning new words, math concepts are best learned when parents and caregivers repeat them to children every day in conversation.

For example, PBS Parents recommends that parents try activities like counting fruit and vegetables in the supermarket, playing card games, and learning how to play an instrument in order to teach young children important math concepts. For very young babies, parents and caregivers can point out shapes, sort objects into size order and count toys together.

count toys together

Learn more:

- A factsheet with valuable tips for how to incorporate math concepts into everyday activities, from [California Mathematics Council](#).
- [PBS Parents](#) offers several ways to instill a love of math in young children.

In The News:

- [“Kids and Math: Teaching it Early, At Home and School, is Critical”](#), *San Jose Mercury News* (op-ed by Liz Simons), December 9, 2013.
- [“The Importance of Talking Math With Kids,”](#) Annie Murphy Paul, January 13, 2014.
- [“Math Skills: What Scientists Can Teach Parents About Kids’ Developing Minds”](#), *Huffington Post*, March 25, 2013.

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