



Research reveals activities proven to boost math smarts

Engaging your child in certain activities can have a positive impact on her number-knowledge in preschool and beyond. Luckily, these math-rich activities aren't complicated. Instead, they are a fun way boost your child's brainpower!

Here are some activities shown to sharpen kids' math skills:

- **Sorting.** Putting objects into categories helps your child grasp basic math concepts. To make it exciting, turn it into a challenge. "OK, let's see who can find five square shapes in the family room first." Or, "How fast can you find six red things in the kitchen?"
- **Cooking and baking.** Every time your child scoops a half-cup of flour or hands you two eggs, she's

exposed to mathematical concepts like *quantity* and *fractions*. It's educational, although she'll just think it's yummy!

- **Handling money.** When you're buying something with cash, point it out to your child. "This gallon of milk costs \$3.70. That means we need three one-dollar bills, two quarters and two dimes."
- **Board games.** Rolling dice and moving pieces around a board offer hands-on lessons in counting. As a bonus, you can also use board games to teach your child how to be a gracious loser or winner.

Source: B. Mutaf-Yildiz and others, "Frequency of Home Numeracy Activities Is Differentially Related to Basic Number Processing and Calculation Skills in Kindergartners," *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Help your child get excited about writing



Preschoolers are just starting to develop the fine motor skills they need to write letters and numbers.

At first, your child's writing may look more like scribbles—and that's OK. His handwriting will improve with practice.

To encourage your child's interest, keep appealing writing tools handy, such as crayons and washable markers. Then seize opportunities for him to write.

You can:

- **Practice writing** familiar words. Help your child spell words he likes, such as *Dad*, *cat* and *me*.
- **Let your child contribute.** If you're making a grocery list or sending a card, have him write a few words.
- **Exchange letters.** Put a box by his bedroom door and "mail" each other letters. If your child can't write words, he can scribble and tell you what it says.
- **Weave writing** into other activities. Have your child dictate captions for drawings, then help him write them.
- **Display what your child** writes. Hang his work on the refrigerator with pride.

Performing chores helps your child develop responsibility



A child who understands and accepts responsibility will do better in school and in life. Asking your preschooler to help out

at home is a great way to teach responsibility. Performing chores:

- **Helps your child** learn new skills and improve with practice.
- **Shows your child** that she can contribute to the family in a meaningful way, which helps her feel capable and important.
- **Builds thinking skills**, such as the ability to plan ahead, solve problems and remember simple directions.

When assigning chores:

- **Make sure they are appropriate** for your child's age.

- **Do the job together first.** Break it down into simple steps. When your child is ready, let her try it alone.
- **Encourage your child.** She won't do the job perfectly. But effort is important! If you must redo the job, do it when your child is not present.
- **Thank your child** for her work and be specific about how her efforts were helpful.

“The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”

—Denis Waitley

Demonstrate the importance of careful and respectful listening



Parents often focus on helping children learn to speak. But children must also learn how to listen. To be successful

in school, they must pay attention to what the teacher says, then act on what they hear. You can help your child develop listening skills in several ways.

First, be a good role model. Set an example by giving your full attention to your child when he speaks. Make eye contact. Smile and nod. Restate what he says to show that you've heard and understood him.

Next, talk to your child about the importance of listening respectfully. He shouldn't make sounds or jump around while listening. Also, explain why it's not acceptable to talk while others are talking.

Here are a few more ways to boost your child's listening skills:

- **Give him multi-step instructions.** “Please go to your room, get your shoes, bring them here and let me help you tie them.”
- **Combine words and actions.** Talk about what you're doing as you do it.
- **Listen to audiobooks.**
- **Attend storytime online.** Check out storylineonline.net/library.
- **Begin to tell longer** and longer stories once your child shows an interest.
- **Speak in a voice** that helps your child listen. Don't speak too fast or too loud.
- **Play listening games.** Have your child go outside and close his eyes. What sounds does he hear?

Are you teaching your child how to adapt to change?



Preschoolers like doing the same things the same way. But changes, both large and small, are a part of life. Are you teaching your

child to adapt? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you follow daily routines**, so your child has an overall sense of security? Does she know what to expect in the morning and at bedtime?
- ___ **2. Do you anticipate changes** and realize that even a small change could seem like a big deal to your child?
- ___ **3. Do you talk to your child** ahead of time about an upcoming change?
- ___ **4. Do you reassure** your child that change can be positive—whether it's moving to a new place or staying inside because it's raining?
- ___ **5. Do you allow time** for transitions, such as by setting a timer for 10 minutes before dinner? When your child hears it go off, she knows she'll need to stop playing soon.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* answer means your child is on the way to dealing with big and small changes in her life. For each *no* answer, try that idea in the quiz.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
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Studies show that preschoolers prefer real-life tasks over fantasy



Fantasy play is a natural part of childhood. After all, what little one doesn't enjoy pretending she's a superhero or a princess?

Or that her stuffed animals can speak?

But studies show that when it comes to real-life tasks, young children prefer reality to make-believe. In other words, they may not enjoy pretending to do something as much as they like actually doing it. Why? Because kids—even preschoolers—want to have a meaningful role in the world.

Does this mean you should swap your child's plastic lawn mower for the dangerous real thing? Of course not! But there are kid-friendly swaps that will make her "play" feel important to her. Here are three ideas:

1. Cutting up fruit. Your child loves using her rubber knife to mimic

chopping food, so why not give her an age-appropriate job in the kitchen? Handing her a steak knife is a bad idea, obviously. But what if you gave her a plastic knife and taught her to cut banana slices with it?

- 2. Using real objects.** Your child may have a bin of play tools and mini musical instruments. Consider letting her explore their real-life versions. She may get a greater thrill out of banging on a full-sized tambourine than a pint-sized tin one.
- 3. Gardening.** If your child's tiny pink shovel doesn't do much, give her your hand spade instead. Let her push it into the dirt and help you with your gardening. She'll get messy, but she'll also get a thrill from doing a real job!

Source: B. Bower, "When it's playtime, many kids prefer reality over fantasy," *Science News*.

Build reading readiness by connecting letters and sounds



The link between letters and sounds, which educators call *phonemic awareness*, is a key step toward reading. To help

your child make this connection:

- **Have your child say a few words**, such as *cat*, *lamb* and *snake*, while looking in the mirror. Show her how she uses her mouth, tongue and lips in different ways to make the various sounds.
- **Read nursery rhymes together.** Point out words that sound similar, such as *dog* and *log*.
- **Teach your child the sounds** some letters make. "The word *sky* starts with the letter *s*. It sounds like *sssss*."
- **Read a book of tongue-twisters** with your child. It's OK if she can't

say them herself. It is more important for her to hear the repeated sounds and learn that many of these words begin with the same letters.

- **Be silly with music.** Sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." After singing it correctly, change the first letter in the word *boat*. Now it's "Row your *coat*." What other silly songs can you and your child come up with?
- As your child gets more familiar with sounds and letters, you can make the activities a bit more challenging. Give her three words, such as *man*, *mat* and *boy*. See if she can tell you which two words begin with the same sound and which word is the "oddball."

Source: J. Fitzpatrick, *Phonemic Awareness: Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills*, Creative Teaching Press.

Q: I have taught my son some basic safety rules, such as looking both ways and holding hands when crossing the street. But now that he is nearly five, I think it's time to work on some more advanced rules. Are there any that will help him next fall in kindergarten?

Questions & Answers

A: It is great that you have been working on safety with your child. And you are correct: Five is a great age at which to emphasize safety, and it is usually part of a kindergarten curriculum as well.

Focus on basic safety rules for now. Teach your child how to:

- **Say his first and last name.** He should also learn the first and last names of his parents. "You call me Mom. But what is my name?" Talk about when it's OK to share this information, and with whom.
- **Recite his home address** and your telephone number. Try to make up a little rhyme or song that includes this information. Research shows that many children learn well through music.
- **Dial 911** in the event of an emergency. Teach your child how to use the phone if he doesn't already know how. Then teach him to dial this number *only* in an emergency. An emergency can be hard to explain to a young child, so be specific: He should dial the number anytime you tell him to, in the event of a fire and anytime he is talking to you and you are physically unable to talk back to him.
- **Protect against illnesses.** Show him how to wash his hands and remind him of key times to do it, such as after using the bathroom or before eating.

The Kindergarten Experience

Expand thinking by asking your child questions



Every day is filled with opportunities to help your kindergartner think. As you observe the world together, talk about what you see and ask your child questions.

Answering interesting questions helps your child strengthen the thinking skills he needs to be successful in school. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- **What are some things** that make your teacher special?
- **If you could change** one school rule, what would it be? Why?
- **What rules do you think** everyone in the world should follow? Why?
- **What are some things** that make our family special?
- **What is something** you have learned in school that will help you when you are older?
- **What makes someone** a good friend?
- **Who do you know** that is a good friend?
- **If you could go anywhere**—even to a different time—where would you go?
- **If you could make** any animal talk, what animal would it be? What might it say?
- **What would you do** if you were invisible?
- **What is your favorite season**—winter, spring, summer or fall? What do you love about it?
- **If you could receive any gift** in the world, what would it be?
- **If you could give any gift** in the world, what would it be?

The new year is a great time to make learning resolutions

January is the perfect month to start over! Not only is it the first month of a new calendar year—it also falls right in the middle of the school year.

Use this time to look back on the first half of the year. Then, consider making some resolutions to boost your kindergartner's learning.

Your family could resolve to:

- **Get enough sleep every night.** Your kindergartner needs 11 to 12 hours of sleep each night in order to grow and thrive.
- **Limit screen time.** If your child indulged too much over winter break, cut back. Offer fun alternatives to using digital devices.
- **Read together every day.** Have a regular read-aloud time for the entire family. Or, set aside time for family members to sit together and read quietly.



- **Take part in activities** that help your child learn but are also fun, such as putting together puzzles, building with blocks and playing board games. Go to the public library to check out books. Visit a local nursery to identify plants.

Reinforce the behavior system your child's teacher uses



Kindergarten teachers often use a color system to assess and manage student behavior. Some display green next to a student's name when she has good behavior, yellow (as a warning) when a student misbehaves and red when a student continues to misbehave.

Find out what behavior system your child's teacher uses and consider using a similar system at home. To reinforce a color system:

1. **Get three paper plates.** Color the edges in green, yellow or red. Draw a smile on the green plate, a straight line on the yellow, a frown on the red. Display the plates in the room your family uses most often.
2. **Start the day or week** with the green plate showing. When your child misbehaves, warn her by displaying the yellow plate. If she persists, display the red one. This might mean a time out. As her behavior improves, go back to the green plate.