

Beginning your child's mathematics journey.

When preparing our children for their school adventures there are so many things that we, as parents, need to think about. In addition to those essential self-management skills such as toileting, looking after their belongings and how to socialise with their peers, we need to remember to expose them to early literacy and numeracy skills. All too often, early numeracy skills get placed in the 'too hard' basket. This doesn't have to be the case.

Exploring early numeracy with your child can be a fun way to spend time together and can often be a totally 'organic' activity. Research shows us that skills learnt 'organically' or through play and exploration during the early years, stay with us as we grow. The key is to keep it fun and casual. Focus on quick, enjoyable activities that fit in with your everyday life.

Counting

Take every opportunity to count with your child. Start with numbers to 5, then back from 5 to zero. Once these are easy, extend them to 10 and 20. You can do this by counting socks into their drawers, peas on their plate, carrot sticks in their lunch, etc. Once your children can count forwards and backwards easily, expose them to the words 'before' and 'after'. These words are huge in early numeracy as they help a child understand the very beginnings of addition and subtraction. You can ask questions like, "You are 4 now, how old were you **before**?" and "How old will you be **after** 4?" Teen numbers can be tricky for them to pronounce so make sure you speak clearly when you are counting through these together. Remember to show them what the numbers look like as well as how to count and say them. This helps them when they come to writing their numbers and recording their answers at school. You can do this with money, the clock, letter boxes, those birthday cards and even tv channels.

Fractions

Fractions often seem like a 'big kid' thing but actually, it can all start when they are very young. Learning the vocabulary of fractions such as 'halves', 'quarters' and 'thirds' makes a big difference. When you cut up their toast in the morning, ask if they want it cut into halves or quarters and talk about the difference (4 pieces or 2). When sharing food (banana, muffin, chocolate bar, etc) explain you are sharing it evenly into thirds or 3 pieces. Discussing measurements such as half and quarter cups when baking, gives them the knowledge that we use fractions for all different things but they still just mean 'sharing things evenly'.

Shapes

There are shapes everywhere in our lives. We often forget to talk to our children about these and give them their proper names. Asking your child if they want their sandwiches cut into squares or rectangles helps them understand the difference in shapes. Cutting cookies into circles, stars, semi-circles, etc is a fun way to expose them to slightly different 2-D shapes. Talking about balls as spheres, the pyramids in Egypt and even cutting chicken into cubes for cooking will give them exposure to common 3-D shapes.

Exposing your child to the vocabulary of math will make their journey to school much smoother. It provides them with basic knowledge they need to begin their math work and to make their first lessons in numeracy at school just that little bit more enjoyable. The fact that you can do it as part of your everyday life, makes it all that much easier for you as well.

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