

Helping your Child to Develop Numeracy Skills

Numeracy includes number and counting, matching, recognising shapes and patterns, and understanding measurements and space.

Children's early experiences of numeracy should be based on first-hand experiences of the things around them. For example, children learn what is 'big' and what is 'little' while looking at dogs running around a field or when hearing the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

You can encourage your child's numeracy skills by using opportunities in your everyday life such as counting out loud how many places needed to set the table, matching up pairs of socks or shoes, fitting together cups and saucers and filling up a glass from a jug.

- Give your child a variety of materials to explore. Inexpensive materials are good, for example, cardboard boxes, wooden and metal spoons, newspaper, water.
- Provide materials and experiences that encourage comparison, for example, small items that children can manipulate easily such as shells, bottle tops, beads, art materials. Children can also make patterns with these or use them to stack and arrange.
- Count objects with your child – move objects to one side as they are counted, recount the same set with objects in a different order, and arrange them in different groupings, in a circle or straight line. Count items that can be touched but not moved, for example, 'How many of your family are in this picture?' and count out a given quantity, 'Please find three scissors.'
- Count body parts with your child, 'I see one, two, three, four, five toes!' as well as other objects. Think of fun and unusual things to count.
- In the course of conversation, count materials your child is exploring and playing with – 'You drew one, two, three lines on your paper.' 'I see one, two, three corks in your cup, and one, two corks in my cup.' 'You have one, two, three buttons on your jacket!'
- Listen for and build on the number comparisons your child makes in everyday conversation, for example, 'my birthday is after yours', 'my train is longer than yours'. Respond by asking 'show me how you know that'.
- Recite the number names in the correct order consistently – use opportunities as they arise, for example counting the candles on the birthday cake. Use action rhymes and songs.



Tip Sheets for Parents

Barnardos Training and Resource Service



- Watch for and support your child's repeated actions (hitting the xylophone to make a sound) and action sequences (stacking the blocks, knocking them down, stacking them up again, knocking them down again).
- Give your child time to use their own problem-solving skills. Try to interact with rather than manage them. Adults who manage (pass out instructions and warnings) rather than interact (play and converse as partners) prevent children from confronting and working with child-sized problems.
- Sing number rhymes as your baby is being dressed or having their nappy changed.
- Dance with your child to different types of music so they can experience 'fast' and 'slow'.
- Give children opportunities for sand and water play.
- Use written numerals and encourage your child to use them. If adults use writing materials children will imitate when they are ready.
- Read books that have stories with number or comparisons (the Three Little Pigs, Billy Goats Gruff). Books are also a great way to enable children to recognise and use number words and symbols.
- Provide materials with numbers on them such as phones, clocks, electronic stop watches, price lists, money, calculators.
- Encourage your baby to tap and clap their hands to simple rhythms.
- When on walks with your child notice the patterns in the pavement blocks of the footpath, the patterns on the bricks of houses and in nature (for example the wings of a butterfly or a ladybird). Point patterns out inside too, for example on curtains, clothes, floor tiles and wallpaper.
- When outside, allow your child to climb and explore, for example, on ramps, steps, tree stumps, climbers. Let them explore 'inside' and 'under', for example, boxes, tables, tents, blankets and play houses.
- Children develop as they play with blocks. All children begin by exploring the qualities of blocks, including size, shape, weight, texture, and colour. Block play can therefore provide the kinds of mathematical experiences that engage all types of numeracy: number, counting, patterns, measures, shape and space and problem-solving.



- Use 'time' words – early, late, weekday, weekend, second, minute, hour. Talk about the time for different things you do every day, 'It's ten o'clock, time to go to break'. Let your child see you mark dates on a calendar, for example, 'Your birthday is next week.'
- Use the language of quantity to make comparisons – 'more', 'lots', 'few', 'too many', 'not enough' – during your child's play. For example, 'How many are there now?', 'Are there enough chairs for the dolls? Let's count them', 'Will we get the same number of cars?'