Making sense of maths

Understanding numbers and how maths is used are essential skills for your children. Think out loud and get your children involved when you use numbers so they see just how useful maths is every day.

What can I do?

• In the kitchen: Prepare meals together. Ask questions like How many plates do we need? Get your children to measure ingredients. Talk about time and how long things take to cook. Help them learn to read analogue and digital clocks.

• During bath time: Count how many mugs of water it takes to fill a plastic jug.

• In the laundry: Get your children to help you sort the clothes into piles of colours, and count and match socks.

• In the car: Count the number of cars you pass. Count the number of cars by colour. Keep a tally and see which colour ‘wins’.

• While shopping: Ask your children to count the number of items in the trolley. Work out how many of each item is needed. Point out 3D objects like cylinders. When unpacking the shopping ask them to find and group the heavy, light and tall items.

• When walking around the neighbourhood: Point out house numbers and talk about odd and even numbers. Count the number of houses in your street. Point out shapes. Talk about directions such as left and right.
Suggested reading
1. One is a Snail, Ten is a Crab by A P Sayre and J Sayre
2. Edward the Emu by K Sheena and R Clement
3. Rosie’s Walk by P Hutchins
4. Fifteen Pigs on a Pirate Ship by P Edwards and G Parkin
5. The Very Hungry Caterpillar by E Carle

Fun activities
1. Treasure hunt: This helps children practise their reading and learn about directions and positions. Write directions for your children to find clues which tell them where to look for the next clue, continuing until the ‘treasure’ is found. For example: Look under your pillow; look behind the kitchen door; look on top of the television; look in the washing basket.
2. Mystery number: Think of a number. Ask your children to guess what it is as you give clues like My number is more than 10 but less than 19. It is an even number. Sometimes it’s called a dozen. Include addition, subtraction and multiplication clues to make the game more advanced.
3. Balloon tap: Count how many times you can tap a balloon to each other without it touching the floor. When it hits the floor, start again.
4. Numberplate search: Look for a numberplate that has a 1 in it. Then find a plate with a 2 in it; then 3 and so on. Ask your children to add the numbers on the plate together; or take the smallest number away from the biggest number. Look at the plate’s digits and ask What number do they make? What is the biggest number you can make with those digits? What is the smallest number?

It is important to encourage and praise children when they are learning something new. Even if they make mistakes they are having a go and that is good.

Your partnership with the school is really important. Talk with your child’s teacher regularly about how your child is progressing.

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