

Fun ways to help your toddler learn math

BY DR ARVIND GUPTA, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 24, 2009



David Pelletier and Jamie Sale with their new baby, Jesse, at a news conference in November 2007 in Quebec City. The Olympic gold medal-winning pairs skaters, who were married in 2005, are new inductees into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame.

Photograph by: CNS, files

It might take a while to get around to long division, but a toddler is certainly capable of learning the basics required to adapt to math. Try these tips with your child and calculus could be just... well... years away. But still.

- Put out little blocks or other small toys that will fit in an egg carton, and watch your child fill up the carton. (Good for practicing one to one correspondence.) You can increase the matching skills by colouring the bottom of the egg holes to match different colours of blocks to see if he/she can match it.
- Draw different coloured circles or use hoola hoops, and provide a variety of coloured objects or toys then help your child to sort them.
- Sort toys by size or shape. Play “which one doesn’t belong?”
- Babies love to fill and empty, stack and sort — and they learn about early math concepts while they’re doing it. Provide containers and small shapes for your baby to stack, fill, empty, and knock over.
- Provide large shape stencils or dotted lines for your child to trace with a paintbrush or wide marker.
- Bake and cook with your child. Let him count out the measurements, scoop the dough, wash the fruit, and read the numbers on the recipe.
- Playdough and different tools help your child to compare different sizes and shapes of objects he creates.
- Play store. You can sort by food type, count, and trade “money.”
- Read, read, read. There are many fabulous books out there that connect early numeracy concepts with early literacy. Vancouver-based publisher Gumboot Books has a number of books that combine poetry and mathematics, including the new title “aRHYTHMeTic”. For more titles, check out Pat Dickinson’s article “Choosing Books You Can Count On” available online from the Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- To help connect vocabulary to spatial sense, ask your child to show you the biggest chair in the room, the shortest pencil, the smallest book, the longest hockey stick.
- Play a movement game and ask your child to go “below” the table, “on top of” the carpet, “beside” the computer, “in front of” the fridge, etc.
- Play with blocks! Plain wooden blocks teach about balance and proportion. DUPLO, Lego, Tinkertoys, K’Nex — whatever you have available to build with and use it.
- Go on a shape hunt when you are out for a walk or running errands together. Encourage your child to look at shapes in the world around them.
- Also, try a number hunt, looking for speed signs, distances, prices of goods, street numbers and much more, says Vancouver Sun reader Pam Hagen.
- Play games: memory games to match pictures (limiting the number of pairs so that your toddler can be successful) or the family favorite Go Fish for number recognition, simple board games like Candyland to practice counting.
- Do simple puzzles for spatial sense. Should you turn the piece to fit in or is it just the wrong shape all together?
- Use words about time during routines: bedtime, afternoon, “Before/After we go there, we will...”

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun