

Early Math Activities for Preschoolers

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Why Early Math Matters

Research shows that early math skills are one of the strongest predictors of later academic success—even more than early reading skills! Children who develop number sense, pattern recognition, and spatial reasoning in preschool are better prepared for all subjects in school.

Tip: Math is everywhere! Look for opportunities to count, sort, compare, and measure throughout your daily routines.

Math Milestones by Age

Ages 3-4

- Counts to 10
- Recognizes some numbers
- Sorts by one attribute
- Names basic shapes

Ages 4-5

- Counts to 20+
- Recognizes numbers 0-10
- Creates simple patterns
- Compares quantities

Ages 5-6

- Counts to 100 by 1s and 10s
- Writes numbers 0-10
- Simple addition/subtraction
- Measures with objects

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Counting Stairs & Steps

5-10 min

Counting & One-to-One Correspondence

Materials:

- Stairs or stepping stones
- No materials needed!

How to Play:

1. Count each stair as you walk up and down together
2. Touch each stair while saying the number
3. Ask "How many stairs did we climb?"
4. Try counting backwards going down
5. Vary by counting steps to different rooms

☆ *This daily routine builds counting into everyday life naturally.*

Counting

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Snack Time Math

10-15 min

Counting, Sorting & Comparison

Materials:

- Small snacks (crackers, berries, cereal)
- Plate or napkin

How to Play:

1. Give your child a small pile of snacks
2. Ask them to count how many they have
3. Sort snacks by type, color, or size
4. Compare groups: "Which has more? Which has fewer?"
5. Practice "one more" and "one less" by adding/eating

☆ *Edible math is highly motivating! Use this before snack time.*

Sorting

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Shape Hunt Adventure

15-20 min

Shape Recognition

Materials:

- Paper and crayons
- Camera or phone (optional)

How to Play:

1. Choose a shape to hunt for (start with circles)
2. Walk around your home or neighborhood
3. Point out and name shapes you find
4. Draw or photograph each shape discovery
5. Create a "shape book" with your findings

☆ *Circles are easiest to find, then rectangles. Triangles are harder!*

Shapes

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Number Card Games

15 min

Number Recognition & Sequencing

Materials:

- Index cards with numbers 1-10
- Small objects for counting

How to Play:

1. Lay out number cards in random order
2. Have your child put them in sequence (1, 2, 3...)
3. Match the correct number of objects to each card
4. Play "What number is missing?" by hiding one card
5. Practice saying "what comes before/after" each number

☆ *Start with just 1-5, then expand to 1-10 as skills grow.*

Numbers

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Pattern Block Creations

Patterns & Spatial Reasoning

20 min

Materials:

- Pattern blocks or colored shapes
- Pattern cards (optional)

How to Play:

1. Start a simple pattern: red, blue, red, blue...
2. Ask "What comes next?"
3. Let your child create their own patterns
4. Try ABC patterns: circle, square, triangle, repeat
5. Build pictures using shapes and describe them

☆ *Patterns are the foundation of algebraic thinking!*

Patterns

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Measuring with Objects

Measurement & Comparison

15 min

Materials:

- Building blocks or paper clips
- Various objects to measure

How to Play:

1. Choose something to measure (book, shoe, toy)
2. Line up blocks end to end along the object
3. Count how many blocks long it is
4. Compare: "The book is 5 blocks. The shoe is 3 blocks."
5. Ask "Which is longer? Which is shorter?"

☆ *Non-standard units (blocks, hands) are perfect for beginners.*

Measurement

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Dice Addition Games

Addition & Subitizing

15 min

Materials:

- Two dice
- Small counters or tokens

How to Play:

1. Roll one die and count the dots
2. Roll again and count those dots
3. Push the groups together and count all
4. Say the math: "3 and 2 makes 5!"
5. Use counters to represent each roll if needed

☆ *Subitizing (recognizing quantities without counting) develops with practice.*

Addition

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Sorting Laundry Math

Sorting, Counting & Categorizing

15-20 min

Materials:

- Clean laundry (socks work great!)
- Sorting baskets or piles

How to Play:

1. Sort socks by color, size, or pattern
2. Count how many in each group
3. Match sock pairs together
4. Compare groups: "More striped or more solid?"
5. Practice folding and counting other items

☆ *Real-world math helps children see why math matters.*

Sorting

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Number Line Hop

Number Sequence & Addition/Subtraction

10-15 min

Materials:

- Tape or chalk
- Open floor or sidewalk space

How to Play:

1. Create a number line 0-10 on floor with tape or chalk
2. Start at 0 and hop forward while counting
3. Practice "2 more than 3" by hopping from 3 two spaces
4. Try hopping backwards for subtraction concepts
5. Call out numbers and have child hop to them

☆ *Gross motor + math = better retention!*

Number Line

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Grocery Store Math

Real-World Math Application

20-30 min

Materials:

- Grocery list
- Shopping cart or basket

How to Play:

1. Let your child help count items into the cart
2. Find items by quantity: "We need 3 apples"
3. Compare sizes: "Which box is bigger?"
4. Look for numbers on signs and packages
5. Count items at checkout

☆ *Narrate your math thinking: "I need 6 eggs. Let's count..."*

Real World

Number Recognition Tracker

Circle numbers as your child masters recognizing and naming them:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
			14	15	16	17	18	19	20				

Math Skills Checklist

Counting

- ☐ Counts to 10
- ☐ Counts to 20
- ☐ Counts objects (1-10)
- ☐ Counts backwards from 10

Concepts

- ☐ Recognizes basic shapes
- ☐ Creates AB patterns
- ☐ Compares more/less
- ☐ Understands first/last

Notes & Observations
