

February 2008**Math: Sorting and Classifying**

We naturally sort and organize in our daily lives whether we realize it or not. Classifying objects, thoughts and ideas enables us to make sense of the world. We do this all our lives, and we start very young. The ability to sort and classify comes very early in life. Babies are able to distinguish between people they know and people they do not know. This categorization ability allows children to build attachment with their caregivers. Sorting and classifying are important skills in building emotional intelligence

Sorting and classifying skills are also important in building cognitive skills, such as language development and mathematics. The foundation for understanding mathematics is the ability to organize objects into groups that are alike or not alike. Young children first begin to sort objects by physical attributes such as color or shape. As they continue to develop, they organize objects by the objects' categories (e.g., animals that you would find on a farm). Children then begin to learn to recognize and create patterns, and as they continue to develop, they continue to build on their classification skills with more-advanced concepts and activities. It is important to provide children with many opportunities to practice sorting and organizing through exciting and fun daily activities.

Activities

Social and Emotional

Toddlers (18 months–36 months): Spending time doing activities with your toddler is a great way to foster a strong relationship and build your child's self-esteem. Incorporate sorting with your toddler into your day. Everyday household objects provide great opportunities. For example, have children sort socks, fruit or other objects that share at least one attribute, like shape or color. Be involved while your child sorts.

Preschool (3–5): Having children work together in a group to sort similar objects helps children build relationships with their peers and develop problem-solving skills. Children learn from each other. Having children work in mixed-age groups helps the older children refine their skills, and they serve as a model for younger children.

Physical Development

Toddlers (18 months–36 months): Toddlers spend a lot of time exploring. Take this opportunity to help them develop their fine motor skills by allowing them to grasp and sort blocks, toys and household objects. Create a game in which children place similar-colored objects in a bin or bucket. Place the bucket a few feet away to incorporate large motor skills and coordination into the activity.

Preschool (3–5): Explore the outdoors while building classification skills! Take a walk and collect leaves to take home and sort by shape or color. Use the leaves to make a collage on paper.

Cognitive Development

Toddlers (18 months–36 months): Work on math and geometry skills by sorting objects of similar shapes. For younger toddlers, start off with just a few similar groups. As children get older, expand the activity by adding objects to create more groups to sort. Talk about the specific shapes and their attributes.

Preschool (3–5): Engage children in matching items that have similar attributes. Expand this activity by choosing creative objects. Children enjoy sorting buttons, utensils and toys. Have children sort objects by touch, texture or where they would be found; also ask children to order objects by size.

Language Development

Toddlers (18 months–36 months): While involved in sorting activities with young children, verbally label each step of the process. Describe the attributes of the objects. Talk about what makes the objects alike and what makes them different. As children advance, have them describe the objects.

Preschool (3–5): Engage preschool-aged children in open discussions about the concepts of "same" and "different." Ask children to describe objects and talk about why they sorted the objects the way they did.

*All ages and developmental stages are approximate and should be used as a guide. Use your best judgment to create developmentally appropriate activities for your children.

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