

Let's Talk About Math: Making Math Language Part of Everyday Routines!



Apr 18, 2018

By Rebecca Parlakian

Did you know that using simple math language with babies and toddlers helps to build their early math knowledge and their vocabularies?

Some early research has found that the more that young toddlers were exposed to early mathematical language by their parents, the better their vocabulary was and the better some of their early math skills were in preschool.

We know that talking about math helps to build early math understanding. Here are some ideas for how to use early math language with young children. If you want to learn more, check out more from ZERO TO THREE on [early math](#).

To build number concepts and an understanding of quantities:

- Point and count how many eyes the stuffed dog has or how many legs the caterpillar puppet has.
- Count the steps up to the front door and down again.
- Observe which pile of goldfish crackers has *more* or *less*.
- Ask the child if they want a *lot* or a *little* play dough.

Parent Resource Cont.

To build an understanding of operations (early addition and subtraction), observe the changing relationships between quantities:

- *Look, you have 1, 2, 3 blocks. I have 1, 2 blocks. Now I'm going to take one more block and then I will have 1, 2, 3 blocks, just like you!*
- *You ate 2 of your banana slices. Now you have 1, 2 banana slices left.*
- *Kate shared a train with you. She gave you 1 train and now she has 3 trains left.*

To nurture shape and spatial awareness, try talking about:

- The shapes that children encounter each day: *Let's look up – do you see any squares on the ceiling? Yes, the tiles are squares.*
- The relationship between objects: *The car is right next to the house. I see you put the stuffed bunny inside the box. Try turning it around—the button is on the back.*
- Direction and movement: *When you rolled the ball, it went straight down the ramp. We are going to turn right because we are walking to the freezer aisle.*

To help young children notice patterns, describe what you're seeing and doing:

- *First we changed your diaper, now we are getting your bottle. Then it will be naptime.*
- *Let's do a dance: Clap, stomp, clap, stomp, clap, stomp. Can you try it too?*
- *Your shirt has red, blue, red, blue stripes.*



Parent Resource Cont.

To raise awareness of measurement concepts like length, weight, height, speed, and temperature, use vocabulary like:

- *Look how **big** that dog is. And the other dog is so **small!***
- *When you pushed the car down the slide, it went so **FAST.***
- *Today is **hot.** Today the sun is out and we are wearing shorts and t-shirts.*

Many adults—myself included—don't always feel the most confident about their math abilities. But the strategy of using everyday math language builds on the everyday moments we already share with our babies and toddlers. This helps our children build a strong foundation of early math knowledge that they'll use now, *and* when they arrive in school.

