

By Laura Bilodeau Overdeck□□

Math is everywhere. That's great news for parents, because we can talk with our kids about math in fun, natural ways. And that kind of math-talk is really important.

Studies show that a child's math skills at kindergarten entry are a better predictor of future academic success than reading skills, social skills, or the ability to focus. As parents, we can give our kids a head start by helping them get comfortable with math concepts like measuring and counting at home.

□□ Here are five ways to add math to your child's day.

1. Bake something together

You can't help but use math when you're baking. Doubling recipes requires multiplying, halving a recipe requires dividing, and measuring a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup or a $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon gets you working with easy fractions. At a more basic level, kids love counting out chocolate chips. (And so do the parents; we speak from experience!)

Ask your child: *How many chocolate chips do you think it will take to fill one cup? How many for 1/2 cup? Count together and see how close you came to the right answer!*

2. Measure, count, and record

Most kids love stopwatches, and watching the seconds tick by gives them opportunities to practice counting. Measure distances and heights. Count jumping jacks, push-ups, or consecutive kicks of a soccer ball.

Ask your child: *How far can you throw a ball? Take a guess, then throw the ball as far as you can and measure the distance.*

How many jumping jacks can you do in a minute? Try it!

How many times can you jump rope or bounce a ball without missing? Count and see.

3. Build something together

Big or small, any project that involves measuring includes counting, adding, and multiplying. It doesn't matter whether you're making a clubhouse out of

shoeboxes or building a genuine tree house. Legos and other building toys are wonderful tools for incorporating both numbers and spatial thinking into playtime.

Ask your child: *How high can you build that stack of Legos?*

How many Legos do you need to stack to reach as high as the coffee table?

Can you make a square? A rectangle? Other shapes? Talk about the shapes of whatever your child has created.

4. Plan dinner or a party

Whether you're planning a party or just getting ready for a family dinner, there are plenty of math concepts involved. Have your child help set the table and count out the plates, napkins, and silverware. For a party, have your child help with the shopping. You know you're going to have to do some math since all of those plates, balloons, and party favors are packaged in different quantities!

Ask your child: *How many plates, napkins, and forks do you need for dinner?*

If you're inviting 10 guests to a party, and the plates come 8 to a pack, how many packs are you going to need? How many are going to be left over?

If you're not planning a party in the near future, get creative. Why not host a tea party for your child's favorite stuffed animals?

5. Mix in math to your bedtime reading

Most families read to their children at night. Why not add a math problem to the mix? Here's one to try.

Melt in Your Mouth

No matter how much you love your favorite snack (apples, marshmallows, pound cake), it probably tastes even better dipped in something warm and gooey.

That's what you do when you eat fondue. You fill the fondue pot with cheese or chocolate, put it over a hot flame, and then dip pieces of food into the yummy meltedness using long skinny fondue forks.

It all started with cheese fondue in a Swiss recipe in 1699, but since then we've added meat fondue (where you carefully cook chunks of steak in hot oil) and, of course, chocolate fondue. But you have to pay attention while dipping: Some say that if you drop your apple slice in the pot, you have to kiss the person to your left.

Ask your 3 or 4-year old: *If you dip 2 apple slices and 3 banana slices into your fondue, how many pieces did you dip?*

Ask your older child: *If there are 2 people sharing cheese fondue and everyone wants 3 apple slices, how many apple slices do you need to serve?*

There are plenty of other ways to keep kids thinking about math—board games, stickers, and stargazing, to name a few. The important thing is just to encourage your child to see the numbers all around us and to keep things fun. This is how we'll raise a next generation that thinks math is cool!

Laura Bilodeau Overdeck is a math-lover, mother of three, and founder of Bedtime Math Foundation, a new nonprofit that seeks to make math a fun part of kids' everyday lives. Visit www.bedtimemath.org for more math ideas to try at home.

Reference: Duncan et al. (2007) School Readiness and Later Achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1428-1446.