Marvelous Math Games

Math is not only an important everyday skill for your children to learn—it's fun!

Show them just how much fun math can be with these games for practicing number recognition, counting, adding, and subtracting. It won't be long before you hear your youngsters say, "Let's play math!"

Number know-how

In order

This homemade version of ring toss will help your youngster recognize numbers in order.

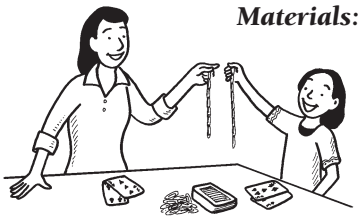
Materials: *10 paper plates, scissors, marker, 10 plastic bottles, water*

Make rings by cutting out the centers of the paper plates. Let your child use the marker to number the bottles 1–10. (*Note:* Fill each bottle with water, screwing the caps on tight so they won't fall over.) Then, line up the bottles from 1 to 10, and have your youngster stand a few feet away. To play, he tosses the rings onto the bottles in order—once he lands a ring on 1, he can move on to 2.

Variations: Have him arrange the bottles randomly but still toss the rings on the numbers in order. Or take away a few bottles, and ask him to toss the rings on the bottles from the lowest to highest number, or the highest to lowest.

Number match

How many is 5? How many is 8? Help your child find out as she matches objects and numerals.



Materials: *a deck of cards (face cards removed), paper clips*

Shuffle the cards, and put them facedown in a stack. Place a pile of paper clips nearby. Ask your youngster to pick a card, lay it faceup, count out a matching number of paper clips, and put the paper clips on the card. For instance, if she drew a 7, she would place 7 paper clips on top of that card.

Then, it is your turn to draw a card and put a matching number of clips on your card. Play three rounds. To tally your scores, you can each chain your paper clips together, counting as you go. The player with the highest total wins.

Count 'em

Domino war

Figuring out whose domino has the most dots will give your child practice in counting and comparing numbers.

Materials: *dominoes*

Lay the dominoes facedown, and mix them up. Let your youngster turn one over, count the total dots on the domino, and tell you the number. Then, you turn over a domino and count the total number of dots. Ask him, "Which number is bigger?"

The player with the higher number takes the pair and starts the contest again by turning over a new domino. (In case of a tie, turn over another pair—the winner gets all 4 dominoes.) The game ends when all the dominoes have been taken. Whoever has the most pairs wins.

Tumbling tower

This simple game helps your child learn the values of coins and get used to counting by 1s, 5s, and 10s.

Materials: *pennies, nickels, dimes*

Start by showing your youngster a penny, a nickel, and a dime and explaining how much each one is worth (1 cent, 5 cents, 10 cents). Then, have her place a penny on a table or the floor and say "1." You add a penny by holding it above the first penny and gently dropping it on top. Say "2." Your child gently drops another penny on top and says "3."

Take turns adding pennies and counting until the tower falls. The person who makes it fall loses. Next, try a round with nickels, and count by 5s as you drop each coin (5, 10, 15, 20…). Then, play using dimes, and count by 10s (10, 20, 30, 40…).

continued

It all adds up

Active addition

Run and add with this racing challenge for three or more players.

Materials: *small toys (miniature cars, toy people, balls), small bags*

One person is the "caller," and the other two (or more) players are the runners. Mark a start and a "turnaround" line for each runner, and place a pile of small toys at each turnaround point. Then, give each runner a small bag.

To start the race, the "caller" yells out an addition problem ("4 + 3"). The players run to their piles, take the number of toys equaling the sum (7), and run back. When they return, have them count the objects to check their answers. The first one back with the correct number of objects wins that relay. Put the objects back, and call out a new problem to play again.

Switcheroo

Switching the cups around keeps this addition game interesting.

Materials: *5 identical paper cups, 20 (or more) Lego blocks or other small toys, paper, pencil*

Place the cups upside down on a table, and put a random number of blocks under each one. (*Tip:* Make one cup a "jackpot" cup with the most blocks.) While your youngster covers her eyes, slide the cups around to mix them up. Have your child choose one. She counts the blocks underneath it and writes that number as her score.

Then, she puts the blocks back under the cup and shuffles the cups around while you cover your eyes. You pick a cup, count the blocks, and add them to your score. Continue taking turns and adding the new number to your score. Play to 20 points (50 for an older child).

Take it away

Snack attack!

"Subtracting" snacks makes this two-player math game fun.

Materials: *pencil, paper, 20 small snacks (crackers, raisins, pretzel sticks), button*

Draw a large tic-tac-toe grid on paper, and randomly fill the squares with the numbers 1–9. Place the grid in the center of a table, and give yourself and your child each 10 snacks (for older children, use 20 snacks). Let your youngster toss the button onto the grid. Whatever number the button lands on is the number of snacks he can take from you. But first, he has to create the subtraction problem and find the answer. *Example:* You have 10 snacks, and the button lands on 6. He would count out your 10 snacks, then count 6 snacks to take away, and finally count the number left (4). He'll see that 10 – 6 = 4. Swap roles, and take snacks from him. Continue playing—the first one to collect all the snacks wins. *Note:* Play with clean hands so you can eat the snacks afterward!

X marks the spot

This paper-and-pencil version of tug-of-war is a clever way to practice subtraction.

Materials: *pencil, paper, game piece, pair of dice*

Make a game board by drawing a row of 21 boxes on a narrow sheet of paper. Have your child print her initials in the first box and your initials in the last one. Mark the middle (11th) square with an X, and place the game piece on it.

Let your child roll the dice and subtract the smaller number from the larger one (5 – 3). Once she has the answer, she moves the game piece that number of spaces (2) toward her initials. Then, you do the same thing—and move the game piece back toward your initials. *Tip:* Let your youngster use small "counters" like macaroni noodles to help her solve the problems. The winner is the player who, on the exact roll, gets the game piece into her box.

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