

Dear Parents,

April, 2005

Things have been very busy in the Junior Kindergarten room. Lately, the J.K.s have been busy exploring the concept of living things and the life cycle changes such as plants, butterflies, and frogs. We are focusing on living things and how they grow as well as the influence of environmental elements (rain, sun, wind). The children have made a "spring board" with flowers, rain, clouds, and butterflies. We will continue to discuss life cycle concepts and see where this leads us. We will keep you posted. Emergent curriculum is at its best as we follow the children's lead and support their interests through a variety of activities and by enriching their environment with stimulating materials. The love of learning is evident when all the children are engaged in their own experiences and interact with one another. Along with creating a stimulating learning environment, it is essential that teachers offer children opportunities to explore mathematical concepts in a fun and carefree way.

Understanding the "Strange Things" About Counting

Teaching your child to recite the numbers from one to ten is one thing. Helping your child understand what those numbers mean is quite another.

Listen to a conversation between four-year-old Annie and her dad:

"Daddy guess what? I can count to ten real fast: One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten!"

"That's great, Annie, but listen. It's going to be bedtime in five minutes, so start putting your toys away."

"Daddy, no! I need more time than five minutes! Make it a longer time, make it two minutes!"

Among other things, understanding numbers means knowing that:

Two is smaller than five;

Each number stands for one item in a series when you are counting;

The last number you say stands for the total.

As early childhood educator, Polly Greenberg once wrote, "Rote memorization is easy compared to understanding all the strange things about counting." How can you help your child understand some of these "strange things"? It does not take special lessons or workbooks, just a chance to enjoy some everyday experiences with you.

1. Know what to expect.

Greenberg advises that three year olds work best with numbers under four, four year olds with numbers under 10, and 5-and-a-half-year olds with numbers under 20.

2. Count while moving.

If you have a young child, you know that kids like to move. Occasionally add counting to active games and ordinary actions. If you count out loud, your child will listen and eventually join in. Count each step when you are going up or down stairs. When you are rolling a ball back- and forth or pushing a swing, count each push. Count jumps or claps. Counting while moving lets your child experience what number mean.

3. Use your child's interests.

Make counting a natural part of what your child is doing. If your child is playing with dolls, you could say, "My doll is very hungry. Could you give her three cookies?" If your child is stacking blocks, you might comment, "I'd like to build a tower like yours. How many blocks do I need?"

4. Sense when to back off.

The best time to quit is while it is still fun. If you see your child glancing away, wanting to change the subject, or looking anxious, find something else to do.

5. Show your own enjoyment of numbers.

If you disliked math as a child and still feel uncomfortable with it, try not to pass your feelings along. Instead, convey the attitude you want your child to have now and in the years to ahead. By what you do and what you say, let your child know that you think using numbers is an interesting way to understand the world.

Enjoy the world of numbers with your child!

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