







# Things to Do while You're Waiting: Math



*It's happening again! You're running errands with your children and suddenly you're stuck—in traffic, at the clinic, in the checkout line. Many parents find that playful learning activities can help reduce children's impatience when they have to wait.*

**You can use waiting time to show your child that Math = Part of Life.**

Math is much more than just counting, adding, and subtracting! Playing with math concepts helps children become confident mathematical thinkers. Here are some quick math questions, games, and activities to engage a child who has to wait.

-  **Counting:** Use objects to help your child learn that each item we count corresponds to a number. “Let’s put one can of beans on top of each cereal box.” Ask each other questions like “How many trucks do you see?” “How many people are ahead of us in line, and how many will there be once the front person leaves?” Children like action rhymes that involve counting.
-  **Sequences and patterns:** Order is important in math. Notice sequences with your child: “Looks like we’re the second in line!” Find simple patterns together—the colors of floor tiles or the rhythms of people walking. Invite your child to make visual patterns using small objects around you.
-  **Classifying:** This means sorting things according to different properties. Make a game of sorting objects with your child, such as coins or laundry. Or you might suggest, “Let’s find all the people with hats” or “I’ll spot red cars and you spot cars in your favorite color.”
-  **Spatial relations:** This has to do with shapes and locations of objects. You can “hunt” for shapes together: squares, triangles, rectangles, and circles. Use words like “on,” “under,” and “inside” to describe where you see the shapes. Drawing shapes in the air can also be fun.
-  **Estimation and predictions:** Children often like to make educated guesses. “Will our laundry fit in two washers?” “Which is higher, a stack of five pennies or five dimes?” “How can you tell?” Make a guess first, and then check to see how close your guess came.
-  **Measurement and time:** Investigate measurement together. “How many hands tall is this jar?” “Which is heavier, your coat or your boot?” “How many steps to the car?” Your child may like timing games: “How many times can you count to 10 before we are first in line?” “How long can you stand on one leg?”

For related Web resources, see “Things to Do while You’re Waiting: Math” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



29 Children's Research Center  
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469  
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732  
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)  
Email: [iel@uiuc.edu](mailto:iel@uiuc.edu)  
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State Board of Education

For more tip sheets on other topics, please go to <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>