Count on number games to help your child have fun with math

One of the best things you can do to help your child learn math skills is to make math part of her everyday life. For a preschooler, math is not something difficult to be “worked on.” It’s simply part of the fun. Offer your preschooler lots of opportunities to play with math. Here are some number games to try:

- **Number Feet.** Trace your child’s footprints on paper and cut them out until you have 10 footprints. Label each footprint with a number from 1 to 10 and spread them on the floor. Have your child say the numbers as she steps on each paper foot.
- **Clip and Count.** Label index cards with numbers. Give your child some paper clips. Ask her to put three clips on the card with the numeral 3, and so on. (Be sure to supervise when your child plays with small objects.)
- **Number Trees.** Draw some trees on green construction paper. Label the trunks of the trees with numbers. Cut out a few dozen small “apples” from red paper (try using a hole punch). Ask your child to put the number of apples on each tree that is written on its trunk.
- **Count with Cars.** Label toy cars with numbers from 1 to 10. Make garages out of small boxes and label them with the same numbers. Ask your child to drive each car into the garage with the matching number.

Make time for downtime

Life can get hectic this month as many families struggle to fit holiday activities into crowded schedules. But your child needs a few unscheduled hours each day just to relax with you and play.

Sit on the floor as your child plays with toys. Draw something together. Take a drive or a walk to see holiday lights. The best gift you can give your child is you.

Amplify listening skills

To be successful in school, your child will need to develop her listening skills. To help:

- **Set an example** of good listening. Make eye contact. Smile. Repeat what your child says to show you understand.
- **Explain that kids** can’t listen well if they are making sounds and jumping around while others are talking.
- **Give your child** multi-step instructions.
- **Talk about the things** you are doing as you do them.


Take steps to fight illness

Winter illnesses often result in missed days of preschool and learning. While you can’t keep your child from ever getting sick, you can improve his chances of staying healthy—and in preschool. Make sure your child:

- **Gets at least 10 hours** of sleep a night. Eleven would be even better.
- **Wears warm clothes** and a hat in cold weather.
- **Washes his hands** when he gets home from school.
- **Avoids** sick people.


Winter’s coming! Fill it with learning

December 22nd is the first day of winter. Take advantage of these seasonal activities to teach your preschooler about colors, weather, nature and more:

- **Listen to winter sounds.** Take a walk together and talk about what you hear.
- **Be winter detectives.** Help your child identify signs of winter in a cold climate—low temperatures, less daylight, bare trees or smoke rising from chimneys.
- **Make a paper snowman.** Cut the shape of a snowman out of paper. Let your child glue cotton on the body and add buttons for the coat, fabric for a scarf, yarn for arms and beans for eyes.
- **Match mittens.** Mix up several pairs of mittens (or mitten shapes cut out of colored paper). Have your child sort them into pairs.
- **Create a “no-snow man.”** Help your child stuff a pair of pants and a shirt with newspaper. Draw a face on a bag and stuff it for a head. Talk about the clothes people wear to keep warm.
How do I keep holiday havoc from ruining our routine?

Q: My family finally has a good routine going. But now here come the holidays and winter break! We’ll be more relaxed and flexible, but I don’t want to have to start all over again in January! What should I do?

A: Returning to preschool in January is not usually as difficult for a child as starting a new school year after the summer. But winter break can wreck your family’s routines. Here are some ways to keep things on track so your child won’t struggle to readjust next month:

• **Maintain routines as much as possible.** There will be days when your child eats or sleeps at unusual times, but these are generally events that you can plan for. The rest of the time, make an effort to feed him at the same times he usually eats. Continue his regular bedtime.

• **Stick to your rules!** Does your child whine and grab things from others all year long? Then he shouldn’t do it now, either. The holidays are not a time to forget discipline and respect. In fact, the many changes that occur this season are a good reason to maintain discipline.

• **Remind your child about preschool.** Some kids think the school year has also come to an end when they hear adults talking about the calendar year ending. So, say things like, “Won’t it be fun to tell your teacher about your trip to Grandma’s when you go back to preschool?”

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Are you instilling a work ethic?

When kids enjoy working, they stick to tasks and do well in school. Parents can build their child’s work ethic by showing that effort leads to success. Are you teaching your child the value of hard work? Answer yes or no below:

1. **Do you help** your child get in the habit of picking up after herself?

2. **Do you ask** your child to help you with simple chores, like matching socks?

3. **Do you give** your child “work” toys, such as play brooms and tools?

4. **Do you have** a chore chart where your child can place stars by tasks she completes?

5. **Do you praise** your child’s efforts, even when the results are less than ideal?

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**How well are you doing?**

More yes answers mean you are developing your child’s healthy attitude toward work. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.

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Add the sounds of music

Music has many benefits for children. It can enrich language and vocabulary and help kids identify patterns. To give your child a musical advantage:

• **Have a daily music time.** It could be on the way to school or just before bed.

• **Let him move to music.** This is even more fun if he has a scarf to wave.

• **Blend music with other activities.** Let your child listen to music while he paints, for example.

• **Expose him to rhythm.** Show your child how to clap his hands to the beat.

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Encourage kindness

Students who are kind and think of others are likely to get along with teachers and classmates and contribute to a positive learning environment.

Promote kindness by helping your child make presents for family, or go through her toys and donate some to a needy child. Teach your child to express her gratitude by thanking others who are kind to her.

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Say ‘no’ to tattled tales

Preschoolers love to tattle on others. Parents, however, don’t love to hear it. And teachers love it even less. When your child tattles:

• **Ask two questions:** 1. “Is somebody hurt?” 2. “Is somebody going to get hurt?” If the answers are no, simply say, “No tattling,” and turn your attention away.

• **Offer empathy.** You can validate your child’s feelings without judging something he didn’t see. “You are angry your brother teased you. I’d like to hear you use words to tell him that instead of me.”

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**Parent Quiz**

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