

## Doing the Laundry—Sorting and Classifying

### What the Research Says

- “Sorting and Classifying” relates to activities in which children determine how a set of objects might be grouped. Example:

*A child took all the plastic dinosaurs out of a toy box and sorted them by type of dinosaur and then by color.*

- “Sorting and Classifying” are part of a child’s daily life. Children classify people (family, friends, strangers), toys, (stuffed animals, cars, dolls, blocks), and more.
- Simple sorting and classification are skills used by children to help them organize the world around them.
- Preschool children should be able to classify objects according to their attributes. For young children, classifying starts by sorting objects into groups so that the objects in each group share a common characteristic (color, size, etc.). This requires that children also compare the characteristics of each object before putting it into a group.
- Simple sorting tasks and classification activities are part of the math and/or science curriculum in many early childhood programs.
- Within the algebra strand of the NCTM (National Council on Teaching Mathematics) standards, there is the stated expectation that all students PreK-2 should, “...sort, classify and order objects by size, number, and other properties” (NCTM, 2000).
- The concepts of simple sorting and classifying help children to understand the notion of belonging to a group and, of equal importance, to understand that objects can be grouped in different ways or regrouped. For example, a red square could be grouped with red objects, squared objects, or objects that are red and squared. Later in math, young children may apply these grouping activities to situations such as 9, which could also be viewed as  $3+3+3$  or  $6+3$ .

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### Activities for Families

- To assist young children with the notion of sorting and classifying, set out a number of “containers”(paper plates, small baskets, plastic tubs, etc.) on the floor. Next, put a pile of mixed objects (buttons, pasta, beans, blocks, coins, etc.) on the floor next to the dividers. Finally, have your child sort the items into separate groups by placing the objects into the containers.
- Start with a pile of 4-5 objects that have only one attribute that is different (color, size, or shape). Have your child put the objects into different containers so that the objects are the same in some way. Talk with your child. Listen and accept all reasonable explanations to why objects were classified the way they are.
- In working with simple sorting, tasks selected can become more challenging by increasing the number of objects to be sorted, by having children consider more attributes, and by giving verbal versus visual clues.
- With very young children, it is best practice to show the object and ask the child to place 4-5 objects with one attribute (color, for example) in a container. As your child masters this first step, he/she can sort 6-8 objects with two attributes (color and size).
- Next, move to three different attributes (color, size, and shape). Then, move to four or more different attributes. At this stage you can have your child sort by the objects function or by items using or effecting different senses (for example, animals eat grass or animals with rough skin instead of fur).
- Give your child lots of opportunities to sort and classify objects throughout your regular day. Have your child:
  - put the silverware away and let them sort by knife, fork, and spoon.
  - put things into recycling bins and let them sort by plastic, cardboard and paper.
  - Put items in a jewelry box and let them sort by rings, earrings, and necklaces/bracelets.
  - Sort dirty clothes into piles based on their color—light, dark, and multi-colored.
  - Sort clean clothes into specific piles—pants, shirts, socks, towels, etc. OR by family members—mom, dad, brother, sister, etc.
  - String beads on a necklace or bracelet. Separate them out by color, shape, size, etc.
  - Play with stacking toys such as blocks and LEGOS
  - Play with stuffed animals by sorting them into areas at the zoo.
  - Separate beans, coins, and buttons into an egg container.
  - Cut out pictures from a magazine or newspaper in order to sort them into different categories.

## **Doing the Laundry—Sorting and Classifying**

### **Advice for Families**

- Model and verbalize aloud, during daily routines, how you are sorting and classifying different items (laundry, food in the refrigerator and pantry, cooking and baking products, etc).
- Encourage attempts at sorting and classifying made by your child. Children need lots of practice learning new skills and tasks.
- Introduce sorting and classifying with objects and toys that your child is familiar with (blocks by color, Matchbox cars, socks: white and not white, silverware: forks, spoons, etc).
- Encourage your child to explain their thinking about why they sorted objects a certain way. Be open to more than one right answer.
- Draw attention to object attributes (size, shape, function, use, location, etc.) and possible ways they could be sorted and classified. This is the beginning of mathematical communication.