

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 $6+3$.