

Early Childhood Education

Video 3: Setting the Table

Category: Early Childhood Mathematics

Grade Band: Ages 3 to 5

Topic: Daily Activities

Concept 1: Learning to...

Context: Setting the table

Rationale: Children enter kindergarten with a wide range of mathematical knowledge. Young children develop mathematical knowledge when they mathematize their world. “To mathematize is to focus on the mathematical aspects of a situation and then to formulate that situation in mathematical terms; it is a means for children to deepen, extend, elaborate, and refine their thinking as they explore ideas and lines of reasoning.” It can be as simple as seeing the mathematics in a situation and using mathematical language to describe what they see. For example, a child might say, “I have three crackers.” rather than saying, “I have some crackers.”

Parents and caregivers can help children mathematize their world by initiating activities and conversations around mathematical ideas. With rich activities and conversations children develop an understanding of mathematical concepts. They also learn reasoning skills, communication skills, ways to represent mathematical ideas, and problem-solving skills.

Opportunities to mathematize setting the table:

1. **Rational Counting and Cardinality:** Count how many will be eating dinner.
Possible conversation and actions: Who will be eating dinner at our house tonight? How can we find out how many people that will be? Count on fingers as named, make a list and count, or count the chairs where each person typically sits. So how many people is that?
2. **One-to-one Correspondence:** Set the table for a given number of people.
Possible conversation and actions: If there are __ people, how many plates do we need? Place plates on the table. Place a glass next to each plate. Add silverware.
3. **Comparison:** While setting the table, compare the number of different items.
Possible conversation and actions: While in the process of putting on glasses ask, are there more glasses or plates on the table? Do we need more glasses? How do you know? Tim is too little for a fork. Are there more spoons or forks on the table? How many holes are in the top of the saltshaker? Peppershaker? Does the saltshaker or the peppershaker have more holes in the top?

4. Part-Part-Whole Relationships: Create addition and subtraction word problems.

Possible conversation and actions: There are two blue glasses and four green glasses. How many glasses are on the table? Yes, the two blue glasses are part of the glasses, the four green glasses are part of the glasses and six is the whole amount.

Here are two spoons. How many more do you need to make five? Yes, five is the whole amount, two is part of the spoons and three is the other part. A child may count the two spoons and continue counting three more to reach five. A child may count on from two to reach five.

Grandpa and Grandma are coming for dinner. How many people do we need to set the table for now? How many more plates do we need?

5. Measurement Concepts: Compare objects in the cupboard or on the table.

Possible conversation and actions: Which glasses should we use? Which glasses are tallest? Which glasses are shortest? I wonder which glasses are heavier; the plastic ones or the ones made out of glass. How can we find out? Which plates should we use? Which ones will hold more food? I wonder if our knives or forks are longer? How can we find out? Do you think the ketchup bottle or mustard bottle hold more? Each bottle tells you how much it holds. Is 8 ounces or 12 ounces more?

6. Geometry: Investigate the shapes on the table.

Possible conversation and actions: What shape is the top of our plates? I wonder if there are any other items on our table that are the same shape? The top of the glasses is a circle too. The bottom of the glasses is a smaller circle. What shape are the napkins? Can you fold the napkins to make another shape? What shape did you make? How many sides does your shape have? Yes, it has three straight sides so it is a triangle.

Literacy Connections:

- Developing Oral Language
 - Talking as much as you can to your child while the table is being set. This will allow your child to listen, hear talk, sounds, and intonations.
 - Encourage your child to talk to you. Ask questions that show you are interested in what she thinks and says.
 - Ask questions that require her to talk rather than just give yes or no answers.
- Developing Verbal Vocabulary

- Point out familiar and unfamiliar objects to child and name them. (Say the names and numbers of items too!)
- When a child hears an object called the same name over and over, he learns to connect the spoken word with its meaning.
- Sharing conversations helps teach new words.
- Developing Letter/Alphabet Recognition
 - Environmental print – food items put on the table like ketchup
 - Write out name tags/place cards for each person at the table.
 - Print out specific letters in unfamiliar words for items being set and served.
 - Child could draw pictures of items and write words to label them.
 - Write out the menu with words and pictures
- Helping child to learn the sounds of letters
 - Find an object in the room and say/stress the first letter (plate, “p”, plate)
 - Find and name other objects in the room that begin with the same letter (plate, pictures, pitcher, plant)
 - Pick out words that rhyme with items in and out of the room (spoon—moon—noon—soon/table—cable—fable)

Social Skills:

Endorsement: