



Picking Up Patterns

The ability to reproduce and create patterns is an early math skill that we adults can encourage in young children. Patterns occur throughout mathematics, right from the simplest of concepts to the most complex. And, helping children learn to look for patterns will help them gain a deeper understanding of math. Because young children learn best by touching and seeing, the first patterning experiences we give them at school are with objects rather than with numbers.

Children between 3 and 5 begin to be able to reproduce a pattern created by someone else. For example, if an adult uses blocks to create the pattern of "rectangle, square, rectangle, square, and so on, the child should work toward being able to look at that pattern and use his/her own blocks to make the same pattern.

Almost any set of objects around the house can create a simple alternating pattern (ABAB):

- Spoon, knife, spoon, knife, etc.
- Blue napkin, red napkin, blue napkin, red napkin, etc.
- Nut, bolt, nut, bolt, etc.
- Crayon, marker, crayon, marker, etc.

After children perceive and create this simple patterning, adults can offer more complicated patterns such as nut, nut, bolt, nut, nut, bolt, etc. (AABAAB) or nut, nut, bolt, bolt, bolt, nut, nut, bolt, bolt, bolt, etc. (AABBBAABBB).

Encourage children to create their own patterns with objects. Ask them to predict which object would come next in one of your patterns. Invite them to sketch their patterns.

Finding patterns in the world around them and creating patterns themselves will help children see patterns in more complex mathematics later on.

Letter borrowed from Tracy Fulton, New Westminster School District