

Act It Out

Targeted skill

Young children are expected to model and create addition and subtraction problems in real situations with concrete objects.



Materials

- ◆ stuffed animals, dolls, cars, or other small toys

What to do

Gather a small assortment of toys and ask your child to use them to represent mathematical problems. For example, you might say, “Two bears were sitting on a log. Another bear came by to join them on the log. How many bears are sitting on the log?” Use stuffed bears to “act out” the story and help your child count the bears to get the correct answer.

Extending the activity

- ❖ Be sure to balance addition and subtraction problems. Since “adding more” is often easier for young children to understand, adults tend to offer those kinds of story problems more often. “Taking away” is a bit harder to understand, so be sure to include such problems as well.
- ❖ Enlist the help of family members to act out story problems. Actually having people enter (or leave) a space provides your child with another kind of visual for the story problems.
- ❖ Acting out stories that relate to family activities can keep your child’s attention focused for longer periods of time. For example, use boxes or cans of food to act out problems such as “Mary has three cans of vegetables. The family eats one can. How many cans are left?”

Act It Out (continued)

More questions to ask

- ❖ Ask your child “what if” questions. For example, after your child has acted out a particular situation, ask him or her, “What if there had been two more?” This extends your child’s learning and challenges him or her to look at familiar things in a different way.
- ❖ Using mathematical language in such situations helps your child understand mathematical terms. Simply saying, “Wow, when two cars joined that one car, you had *more* cars than you started with,” helps your child associate the meaning of *more* with an increasing number. Math terms such as *more/fewer*, *greater/less*, *larger/smaller* are often confusing for young children. Using them over and over can help your child understand their meanings.

What your child is practicing

Your child is using his or her toys to accurately represent numbers and the way they are combined and separated. Since this is often a hard concept for young children to grasp, it is helpful to offer many different ways of representing a math problem. Further, physically acting out a problem helps make those abstract ideas clearer.