

Paper-Clip Measurement

Targeted skill

Young children are expected to order objects according to length and identify objects that are about the same length as, or of a lesser or greater length than, a given object.

Materials

- ◆ several paper clips
- ◆ several small objects to measure (various lengths of pencils, pieces of yarn, screws, nails)

What to do

This activity involves using nonstandard measurement to determine the length of an object. Ask your child to place the paper clips beside the object, placing the end of the first one at the end of the object and lining them up end to end. Then ask him or her to count them and say how long the object is in paper clips; for example, "The pencil is seven paper clips long." If the object is longer (or shorter) than the paper clips, use the term *about* to round up (or down) to the closest length.

Extending the activity

- ✦ Your child can use the paper clips to measure other objects in the house. Help him or her measure the length of the place mat, fork, and knife at dinner, tools in the garage, and the height of toys.
- ✦ Ask your child to compare and describe the length of two (or more) objects, using such language as, "The screwdriver is one paper clip longer than the pliers." Help your child use mathematical terms such as *longer than*, *shorter than*, *greater than*, and *less than*.
- ✦ As your child becomes accustomed to measuring with paper clips, have him or her measure with other smaller or larger objects such as pennies, buttons, toothpicks, or blocks. Help your child understand that the length of an object might be described as four toothpicks long or as seven buttons long. Help him or her understand that the length of an object does not change but the way it is described does change according to the unit of measurement.

What your child is practicing

Assigning a number to the length of an object can be confusing for young children. Practicing and talking about the concept helps your child understand it.