

Everyday Math for Infants and Toddlers

Building early number sense through natural moments

Why It Matters

Mathematical thinking starts long before children can count or recognize numbers. When teachers notice, name, and nurture early math concepts in daily routines, they help children build a foundation for curiosity, problem-solving, and language.

The ITERS-3 tool looks for intentional support of early math concepts like quantity, size, shape, and pattern woven naturally throughout the day, not just during planned activities.

1. Math in Daily Routines

Mealtimes

- Use math talk: “You have two crackers.” “Let’s pour a little more milk.”
- Compare quantities: “You have more peas than I do.”
- Talk about size and shape: “Your banana is long; mine is short.”

Diapering & Dressing

- Sequence actions: “First we take off your shoes, then your socks.”
- Use positional words: “Your hat goes on your head; your shoes go under the chair.”
- Count naturally: “One arm in, now the other arm.”

Play Time

- Sort and classify toys: “Let’s put all the red blocks together.”
- Encourage spatial awareness: “Can the bear fit inside the box?”
- Model comparison: “This truck is bigger than that one.”

2. Math in Movement and Exploration

Gross Motor Play

- Count steps while climbing or jumping.
- Compare distances: “You rolled the ball farther this time!”
- Notice patterns in movement: “Jump-jump-spin!”

Manipulatives and Blocks

- Stack and count: “You built a tower with four blocks.”
- Notice symmetry or balance: “It’s tipping! Let’s make it even.”
- Explore shape and fit: “The round one rolls; the square one stops.”

3. Math in Language and Books

Storytime

- Choose books that highlight size, counting, or patterns (e.g., “Big, Bigger, Biggest”, “Ten Little Fingers”).
- Pause to comment: “Look! Three bears. One, two, three.”
- Use descriptive math talk: “That’s the smallest bunny.”

Songs and Rhymes

- Sing counting songs (“Five Little Ducks”, “This Old Man”).
- Emphasize rhythm and repetition to build pattern awareness.
- Add movement: clap once for each number or action.

4. Math in Problem-Solving Moments

- Model thinking: “We need one more cup so everyone has one.”
- Offer gentle challenges: “Can we fit two blocks in the box or just one?”
- Celebrate discoveries: “You found out the small lid fits the cup!”

5. Teacher Language That Builds Math Concepts

Concept	Everyday Words & Phrases
Quantity	one, two, more, all gone, some
Size	big, small, long, short, tall
Shape	round, square, flat, circle
Space	in, out, under, beside, on top
Pattern	again, same, repeat, next
Sequence	first, then, last, after

6. Reflective Prompts for Teachers

- Where do I naturally use math language in my day?
- How can I model curiosity about “how many,” “how much,” or “where”?
- What materials in my room invite children to explore number, shape, or size?
- How can I use daily routines as opportunities for comparison and counting?