



Sorting and Classifying

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Classifying is the important logical skill of sorting a collection of various things into smaller groups. The smaller groups can be based on one or more common factors, such as size, shape, function, color and origin, depending on the particular reason for sorting. Classifications are a part of our lives. Large stores sort their merchandise into departments where people can easily find what they are looking for; mothers sort laundry into various drawers and closets for the same reason. Knowing how to organize makes life easier.

In order to learn this important skill, a child must learn the concept of sameness and difference. We learn that same things belong together in groups. Children learn to answer the questions, "which one belongs to this group?" and "which one doesn't

belong?" A child learns to separate animal pictures and food cards. He helps his mother with the sorting tasks of everyday life: putting away laundry, groceries and his toys.

Once a child has a basic understanding of classification, he can go on to more advanced skills, such as being able to subcategorize. He can start with foods, work down to vegetables, down further to red vegetables and finally end up with a group of red vegetables that he likes to eat.

He can learn to classify together different forms of the same thing. For example, he can see the relationship between prunes in a box, stewed prunes, prune juice, prune pudding and prune pie. He understands that their common factor is their common substance: prune.

Another kind of classification skill is the

ability to put together different visual representations of the same thing. Under the classification rooster, for example, goes a color photograph of a rooster, a black single-line outline of a rooster, a drawing of many roosters, a statue of a rooster and a toy stuffed rooster that belongs to Baby. Each of these is a different rendering, but since they are all representations of the same animal, they can be classified together.

Besides being logical, classification skills have a creative side to offer. A child who can hold up an object and think of several ways in which it could be classified has learned about flexible thinking and the important notion that there is more than one way to look at something.

(Excerpts taken from Learning through Play by Jean Marzollo and Janice Lloyd, Harper and Row, Publisher, Inc. 1972)



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These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

1 Which Pile?

A laundry day experience in sorting skills

Show your child the separate piles you make when you sort clean laundry: Mom's pile, Kathy's pile, the towel pile, the needs-to-be-ironed pile—whatever piles you normally use. Make the sorting task into a game. Take one thing at a time and hold it up for your child to recognize and determine as to which pile it goes in.

Hint: Children love jokes they can understand and correct. For example, you might hold up a small sock and say, "Here's Daddy's sock!" Let your child set you straight.

Dark and Light: Your child can help you sort dirty laundry into light loads and dark loads.

Sorting Socks: Give your child a bunch of socks to sort and pair. The trick here is to match size, color and pattern.

2 Nuts and Bolts

A hardware sorting game

Materials: A large plastic jar with a wide opening, an egg carton, four to five each of twelve different things, obtainable from a hardware store: ½" screws, 1" screws, 1 ½" screws, small nuts, larger nuts, small bolts, larger bolts, small metal washers, medium metal washers, large metal washers, plastic washers, and rubber washers.

How to Play: Fill the jar with all the objects. The game is to sort them into the twelve compartments of the egg carton.

Variation: Use small objects found around the house—toothpicks, paper clips, buttons, coins, safety pins, cut up plastic straws, beads and dried beans.

3 Kitchen Classifications

Knives, forks and spoons: Let your child help put them away; he'll feel proud to have a chore of his own. First, make sure his hands are clean, and then set the silverware down near the silverware drawer. Show him where each piece fits and then let him play and practice alone.

Store Riddles

Knowing where to buy things involves classification. Try riddles on your child as you take him with you to the department store or shopping center. A riddle may have more than one answer. Encourage your child to think of all the possibilities. "I need eggs. Where do I go?" "I need socks. Where do I go?" "I need a toy. Where do I go?" "I need toothpaste. Where do I go?"

4 Picture Cards

Picture cards can be made from magazines, computer graphics, coloring books, etc.

Find two pictures that are the same.

Find the picture that is different.

Animals can be sorted into different types: zoo or farm; 4 legs or 2; groups that fly or can't fly; feathers or fur; etc.

Sort into categories: clothes; food; furniture; toys, etc. Variation: add one card that is different and ask your child to guess which one it is.

Pretend to shop for "only _____(fruit)". Have your child pick out what you need.

Find pictures of what he/she likes to eat. Glue them on separate paper plates into categories: meat, vegetables, fruit, desert, etc.

Please take a moment each month to fill out the brief questionnaire that we have included. We would like to know how helpful (or not) these newsletters have been for you, and how we can improve them for future years.

Please complete and return to your preschool teacher.

January 2007 Newsletter:

The information in this newsletter was (check one):

Informative. The right amount of information

Too brief

Too long

Not helpful

Other: _____

The activities were:

Helpful Activities you liked best (which numbers) _____

Not useful Activities you like least _____

The right amount of activities?

Comments: _____
