

Maintaining literacy and numeracy skills in the home can feel like a daunting task. Here, we are providing a few ideas on how you can support your child's academic learning during this time. This message may seem overwhelmingly long, but don't worry; because the games and activities that are appropriate vary by age and ability, we are including a variety of ideas broken down roughly by age or skill level. Just scroll through to find the most applicable ideas for your children. If you are unsure of your child's skill level, you are welcome to check in with their guide.

Please keep in mind that this need not take over your child's – or your – day. Some of the best things you can do with your child right now to keep them engaged and learning are the activities of daily life. As I told parents in conferences, pretend it is the 1890s, but with hygiene: cook, bake, sew, sing and dance, make art, care for your home. Each of these activities has aspects that support your child's cognitive development. But keeping up with formal skills is important too, if our distancing remains longer-term. So let's jump in for a crash course on supporting your child's academics at home!

Literacy games and drills:

A few notes before the games and activities. Regardless of age, the very best thing you can do right now to support your child's love of literacy is to read to and with them. With the libraries closed, it may be hard to access a variety of new books. If you can afford to purchase, many of our local booksellers are offering delivery, including Page 2 Books in Burien, and Pegasus Book Exchange and Paper Boat Books in West Seattle. If not, consider reaching out to friends and neighbors to start a neighborhood lending library or book share – building a library box would be a great project for elementary age children!

We use cursive at our school. It is easier for most children to write and distinguish among letters, as well as being better for retention later on in life. If you can, continuing this at home will be easier for your child. If you don't remember cursive, you can practice along with your child using the handwriting practice sheets in the attached PDF! There are also charts available online, like this one:

<http://www.cursivealphabetchart.com>

When we help the children to learn letters, we use their sounds rather than their names. For example, instead of calling the letter c “see”, we say that it is /c/ as in cat. If you are unsure what sound each letter makes, this is a good resource: <https://www.montessorimom.com/alphabet-phonetic-sounds/>

Pre-literate (ages 2.5-4.5 or so):

Usually, we would only recommend doing the first four games (the verbal ones) at home, to keep the children from feeling like word games are drudgery. But these are strange times, and we want you to be prepared in case we are home for a long period.

- **The Sound Game** (I Spy, but for sounds!): Pick an object. Name it (“mug”). Emphasize the first sound (“mmmmug. Mmmmmug.”). Clarify the sound (“Mug starts with the sound 'mm'”). Repeat for two more objects. Then, pick one and say “I’m thinking of the one that starts with 'mm'. Which is it?” Repeat. The children will play this game for several rounds. If your child has been in the class for a few months, you can also play with ending sounds (“mug ends with the sound 'g'”) or middle sounds (“mug has an 'uh' sound in the middle”). You can also play this informally by playing ordinary I Spy, but instead of “something brown” you could say “something starting with t”.
- **Listing Things**: Name as many objects in a category as you can, taking turns. This could be a category like “fruits”, or it could be an extension of the sound game (“Let's name as many words as we can that start with 'sss'”). This game improves categorization and logic skills, as

well as boosting vocabulary and sound recognition.

- **The Question Game:** This is really a way to teach conversation skills and logic. If your child comes to tell you something, reflect it back, and then ask a question to gain more information. Continue until one or both of you is done with the topic. For example:
“I built a fort.”
“You built a fort. What did you use to build it?”
“I used pillows.”
“You built a fort using pillows. What color are the pillows?” etc
- **Exquisite Corpse/Collaborative Storytelling:** Tell a story together by taking turns adding a sentence or idea to the story.
“Once upon a time there was a boy named Timmy.”
“Timmy lived in a magical castle with a wizard snake!”
“The snake was named Hissy and he could fly.” etc
- **Letter Practice:** Use a cookie sheet as a place to practice writing letters. Pour in enough flour, sand, salt, or similar into a tray. Draw a letter in the flour and say its sound (for example, draw a cursive s and say “sssss”). Allow your child to trace it. They can also practice drawing their own. If you have a chalkboard, that is also a great place to practice.
- **Scavenger Hunt/Labeling with Letters:** Write a letter on a small piece of paper or a small post-it. Let your child tell you its sound (it's okay to help them if they forget, but give them a moment to try to recall it). They can then either go find something with that sound and bring it to you, or go attach the letter to an object with that sound. This game is great if you are doing something else at the same time.
- **Building Words:** If your child knows a variety of letters (at least half), they can practice building words using individual letters. These could be letters you write on thick paper, alphabet fridge magnets, or letters cut out of magazines or newspapers – a great craft project! If you make a lot of letters, they may choose to make lists, or just to write out a little message. Many children whose hands are not yet ready to write on paper use this as a way to engage in expression or storytelling.

Literate (4ish and Up, depending on ability):

Whenever possible, these games should be useful, or applicable to something in the space around you. I would discourage using the more didactic of these games unless the closure is going to be longer than two weeks, as it is for our Capstone students.

- **Scavenger hunt/Labeling/Action games:** Write a word or short phrase (depending on your child's ability level). Once they sound it out, they can either find what you wrote (if it is an object) or do what you wrote (if it is an action). This can be done with very simple phonetic words for younger readers, who could do things like “get a plant”, or more complex phrases for older readers, like “the clear glass pitcher on the counter”. If they are writing, they can also write their own labels for items in the home – all they need are strips of paper and a pencil!
- **Sight/Puzzle words:** This is a great time to drill puzzle words, especially for our oldest students, who will be out of school for a long time. These are words that don't follow the usual rules of spelling. A good resource for printables can be found here:
<https://kidzone.ws/dolch/kindergarten.htm>.
We teach these using a “three period lesson”. Essentially, it is “see, do, tell.” Part one, See: show the child what the word is (Point to it and say “Friend”). Repeat for two more word cards. Part two, Do: Play a game asking the child to point to, move, or hand you different words (“Where is 'friend'? Hand me 'the'. Put 'learn' here.”) Part three, Tell: when you are confident the

child knows the words, elicit it's name (Point and say, “what is this?”). Once a child has learned several words, you can also just drill them and see how many they remember. Make it a challenge!

- **Short books:** Many children find books intimidating and tiring (it is a lot of effort to read when it is still new to you!), but a short book, like the Bob books series, can be just right. Early reader books can also be appropriate, depending on your child's ability at present. You can also ask your child to sound out a few words here and there in a longer picture book, or take turns reading sentences.
- **Handwriting practice** – Many children genuinely enjoy the chance to improve their handwriting. They are drawn to beauty. We have made some printable sheets available for your use if you have access to a printer. If not, write an example for them, and see what they can do!
- **List making:** Children love lists, and, if your child is writing either on paper or with building letters (see “Building Words” above for ideas on how to provide your child with letters if they cannot yet write), this is a great way to keep their minds going. It could be a practical list, like a list of the food needed on the next shopping trip, or a list just for fun, like everything they can think of that sparkles, or every vehicle they can name.

For those students who will be out longer, this can also be a way to practice phonograms (letters that make a sound other than their phonetic sound, either alone or by combining with another letter; examples would be y as in candy or ch as in chat). You can offer them a phonogram and provide them verbally with words to write that use that phonogram. This gives them practice with it and allows them to get to know it faster. A fairly good set of phonogram words can be found here: <https://www.montessorimom.com/phonogram-words/>

- **Story and Letter Writing:** Older children often love to write down the wonderfully imaginative stories they create. Make lined paper available to them, and encourage them to write stories to accompany their artwork. They can also be encouraged to write down everything they know about a particular topic, like outer space or cats. This is also a great time to start up a pen pal relationship. Your children – especially the older ones - will miss their friends, so encourage them to write each other letters and cards to keep in touch during this separation.

Numeracy/Math Games and Drills

In school, we don't usually begin formal mathematics work until around age 4, and wait to learn math facts or do problems on paper until age 5 or so. But math is everywhere around us! The suggestions here are divided by suggested age and ability, but feel free to reach “down” to a younger age bracket for activities as well.

Younger Numeracy (Under 5ish)

- **Cooking together:** Not only is cooking wonderful for fine motor skills, and a great opportunity for conversation, but it is full of math. Have your child help you count scoops of flour, or try to divide the salad into exactly four portions. It is a chance to practice exactitude in measurement and weight, if you cook with a food scale. Use of the timer both improves time sense, and gives them the chance to practice number recognition. Math is also full of fractions, and is a great opportunity to provide experience adding and multiplying fractions informally.
- **Counting Games/Bring Me Games:** Ask your child to bring you a particular number of objects, e.g. “Bring me four crayons.” Children in this group should stay below 10 objects. If they are on the older side, over 4, you could make it into a numeral recognition game as well;

write a number and ask for “this many crayons”. Whenever there are several items, take the opportunity to ask your child, “Gee, how many pencils do you think are in this pouch?”

- **Anything with geometry:** The sky's the limit! Learn the proper geometric names for shapes together (for example, in the classroom we use “rhombus” rather than “diamond” and “sphere” rather than “circle” for a three-dimensional object) and find them in your home. Stitch shapes onto fabric. Trace a shape, then use a pushpin and a corkboard to punch it out; you can then use these shapes to collage. Quilting is the ultimate exercise in geometry for children who are competent sewers. The Bring Me Game can be used for shapes and solids in addition to counting – or really, for anything you can think of.
- **Measurement:** Use a ruler or a tape measure to find and record the lengths of a variety of objects. This could have practical applications as well. If you are using this time to declutter the home, to sew clothes, or build up your garden, taking and recording accurate measurements is important, and your child can help with that!

Older Numeracy (Over 5ish)

- **Simple board or card games:** Games provide the opportunity for simple logic exercises, and many also require number or pattern recognition. Uno and Set are classics, but children can learn to play games with a standard deck like Go Fish and Crazy 8s – my older brother taught me to play canasta at 6, so anything is within reach! Use your best judgment around what your child is capable of, as well as their ability to handle frustration with grace. Learning to lose is important, but can be worked up to. A good starter list of board games is here: <https://homeschoolgameschool.com/the-best-board-games-for-kindergarten/> Keep in mind that nonessential deliveries will be deprioritized at this time, so consider calling and asking at your local game stores for availability rather than ordering online. Meeples in West Seattle has knowledgeable staff who are happy to help you choose appropriate games for your family.
- **Math Facts:** Although our materials for doing large-scale math problems are not available in the home, your child can still practice math facts as you, and they, are so moved. While totally abstract math problems are not appropriate for the child of this age, they could manipulate small objects like beads or beans to find the answers to problems, either given verbally or on a worksheet. This site has good basic printables: <https://kidzone.ws/math/basicfacts.htm> Many of these worksheets have more problems than may be appropriate for your child to do in one sitting, so consider setting a challenge “How long will it take you to do ten problems? Ready Set Go!” Once they have had a lot of practice, you could do a fun “quiz game” of simple arithmetic problems without the beads.

If you are unsure which operations it would be appropriate for your child to practice, check in with their guide. If your child does not recall what an operation symbol means, a short description should jog their memory: addition is “the one where we put things together”, subtraction is “the one where we take something away”, multiplication is “bringing the same thing over and over”, and division is “the one where we share”. If they are doing division using beads, it may help them to use dolls or minifigs to represent the people they are sharing among.

We have also provided a dice game worksheet that is a two person game. If you can gather up three six-sided dice, you can roll them and take turns using them to combine them in any operation to cross a number off of the game board. For example, a roll of 2, 5, and 3 could be 10 ($2+5+3$), 13 ($5 \times 2 + 3$), 30 ($5 \times 2 \times 3$), 6 ($5+3-2$), 4 ($5+2-3$ OR $(5+3)/2$), etc.