

Math Concepts Found In the Early Childhood Curriculum

A wide variety of words comprise a good math vocabulary. Teachers are often surprised to learn about these words. They don't realize that everyday words such as "over" and "under" are part of the math talk.

Comparing Words

In comparing, the child gains confidence in observing differences in a variety of characteristics such as size, temperature, or loudness. A child may compare weight by holding two objects or using a pan scale to measure them. Here is a list of the common comparing words that form a strong foundation for an early childhood program.

big-little	Toy animals, dolls, people, cars, and trucks
large-small	Beach ball and tennis balls, toy dishes and real dishes, purses and luggage
tall-short	People, trees, skyscrapers, and houses
fast-slow	Songs played at different speeds, cars, children's actions
heavy-light	Rocks, empty and full milk cartons, feathers and blocks
hot-cold	Food, drinks, and the weather
young-old	Babies and grown-ups, trees
loud-soft	People's voices, musical instruments
high-low	Playground equipment, airplanes and cars, musical notes
near-far	People and things in different positions

Prepositional Words

Positional words help the child grasp many concepts about space that will be important in later learning. As children play in the block corner or in the housekeeping area, they have many opportunities to use these words.

in	Playing with a doll house or parking garage
out	
outside	
apart	
over	
under	
top	Stacking objects
bottom	
middle	
together	

Directional Words

Directional words involve movement. These words are common when children are playing with toys that have the capacity to move, such as small cars and trucks.

forward-backwards	During a musical activity or gym game or while using cars and trucks
up-down	
toward-away from	
around	
to the right –to the left	

Sequence Words

Sequence words are very important because they develop a sense of order, which will help the child later when more complex problems are found in our number systems.

first -last	Making a line of zoo animals in which each animal is totally different from its neighbor. Children standing in line to go outside or waiting to wash hands.
beginning -end	
before-after	
In front of –in back of	
ahead of - behind	
middle	
next to	

Shape Words

Using everyday activities to use shape words informally help the child describe everyday objects.

round	Finding and talking about shapes in the environment.
sides	
corners	
flat	
circle	
square	
tube	

Number Words

Children learn to compare quantities and to recognize relationships such as more or less.

more	Talk about quantity at snack time, in the block center, or in the housekeeping center.
less	
the same	
many	
fewer	
greater than	
less than	

The Language of Time

While not technically math words, time words are acquired over a series of many years. Children's time exists in the present. The concept of time-telling comes in around age six to nine. These words are used while using calendars daily or using clocks to learn to tell time. There are general time words such as: morning, night, afternoon. Clock words such as: hours, watch, seconds. And calendar words such as: days of the week, tomorrow, holidays, seasons, yesterday, name of the month.

Adapted from: Smith, S. S. (2009). *Early Childhood Mathematics*, 4th Ed. Boston: Pearson.