WINTER 2026

Early Learning & Education PROGRAMS

What's Inside

Scientific Explorations

Exploring the sciences offers children opportunities to practice skills from across all learning domains. Children learn new vocabulary, draw, practice critical thinking, build math skills, engage in engineering, utilize technology, and learn about similarities and differences. Science is also the perfect platform for children to practice inquiry skills that will strengthen their ability to analyze information, think critically, and solve problems in a logical way.

Support children by creating an environment and curriculum that integrate the concepts of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) throughout the day. Incorporate materials and activities that help children develop inquiry skills such as observing and describing, using scientific tools, measuring, classifying, comparing and contrasting, predicting, drawing inferences and conclusions, recording and documenting, analyzing results, and sharing their discoveries.

Create an atmosphere of inquiry by providing children with scientific tools. These can include magnifying glasses, measuring tape, pencils, journals, and a camera. Choose books related to the collections children are studying for the reading corner, and place materials that inspire curiosity throughout learning areas. For example, you might add wind chimes outside to promote discussions about wind and sound, hang a bird feeder, or place a prism in a sunny window to

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READING ABOUT MATH

Use the following books to introduce and explore math concepts.

- ***A Chair for My Mother*** by Vera B. Williams
- ***Big Little*** by Leslie Patricelli
- ***Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*** by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle
- ***Each Orange Had 8 Slices*** by Paul Giganti Jr.
- ***Freight Train*** by Donald Crews
- ***Mouse Paint*** by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- ***Pancakes!: An Interactive Recipe Book*** by Lotta Nieminen
- ***Round Is a Tortilla*** by Roseanne Thong
- ***Shapes, Shapes, Shapes*** by Tana Hoban
- ***Ten Little Rabbits*** by Virginia Grossman
- ***The Napping House*** by Audrey Wood
- ***We All Went on Safari*** by Laurie Krebs

CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY OF CALIFORNIA

www.chs-ca.org

Learning the Language of Math

Math activities offer children the opportunity to enrich their language skills and connect new vocabulary to experiences and concepts. Educators can take advantage of teachable moments within these activities to introduce vocabulary and expand a child's understanding of a particular concept. For example, a child exploring halved apples at the science table might lift up two halves of a red apple and say, "Look, they are the same." You could answer by saying, "You are right, the apple is symmetrical. When it is cut in half, the two halves look the same. What happens if we put the two halves back together?" From there, the discussion could turn to how two halves make an object whole, and how one half is a "fraction" of the whole.

Sit with the children during activities to observe while they explore. Acknowledge children's observations and use math vocabulary as you describe what is happening. In the example above, the educator agreed with the child's observation and supplied the words: half, halves, and symmetrical to describe the discovery. Finally, ask a question that allows the child to build on their existing knowledge, such as the example above, when the educator asks what will happen if they put the two halves together. Here are some examples of just a few math terms that can be introduced during play: add, angle, estimate, equal, graph, intersect, last, least, measure, middle, minute, the names of shapes, pattern, predict, quantity, ruler, scale, subtract, temperature, total, value, volume, and weight.

Increase math literacy by displaying numbers, shapes, and math symbols in the writing area, choosing books that explore math concepts for the book area (newspaper sports pages with statistics, cookbooks, and maps), and encouraging art activities that involve lines and shapes. Building math language and literacy supports children in expressing their ideas, exploring more complex questions, and developing a deeper understanding of the concepts they are learning.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume I* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

Morning Health Checks

Performing morning health checks when children arrive will help you identify who may be sick before germs can spread. Health checks are not medical examinations; they are a screening tool for making sure children are healthy and able to function for that day. Inform parents that health checks are part of the daily routine and will only take a few minutes each morning to complete.

Greet each child and parent when they arrive. Ask the parent, "Did they eat and sleep well last night?" Then ask the child, "How do you feel today?" While talking to the child about how they feel, observe them for signs of rash, spots, or bumps on their skin. Check their eyes and nose for signs of drainage. Listen for any signs of difficulty breathing, coughing, or sneezing. Touch their skin to see if it feels too warm and pay attention to any unusual odors.

Children who show signs of possible illness and develop stronger symptoms during the day should be excluded from child care until their health improves. Children should also be excluded if they run a fever that is 100° or higher, have a sore throat, unusual urine or bowel movements, vomit more than two times, complain of earache or headaches, or cough consistently.

Children who are excluded from care should see a doctor and get a doctor's note before returning. Learn more by reading the Children's Home Society of California's brochure *When is Your Child Too Ill to go to Child Care?* It is available in multiple languages at the link noted below. Share it with parents today!

Source: The CHS brochure When is *Your Child Too Ill to go to Child Care?* was accessed from **https://chs-ca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CHS_FEP_Too-Illness-Bro_2022_English.pdf** in October 2025.

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Scientific Explorations

create rainbows. You can add interest to the block area by incorporating unusual building materials such as tubes, plastic pipes, logs, wheels, plastic gutters, or large sticks.

Provide children with a variety of collections they can observe, describe, classify, count, measure, compare, and contrast. Collections are a group of objects that have one or more qualities in common. Examples of collections are stones, seashells, buttons, baseball cards, musical instruments, plants, leaves, feathers, sticks, fruits, and vegetables. As children study these objects, they will begin to notice their similarities and differences. Children can use inexpensive muffin tins, plastic divided serving platters, shoe boxes, and other organizing trays to sort objects by their characteristics.

Introduce collections in a group setting where you can guide observations and facilitate conversations with open-ended questions, or statements that lead to further investigation. For example, "I wonder why these are different colors," or "How can we use this?" Encourage children to describe the attributes of objects they are observing, such as their size, shape, color, weight, or texture. Once the collections have been introduced, place them in the science area for children to explore further on their own. Offer opportunities for children to conduct experiments where they can make predictions and observe changes over time such as planting a garden or hatching butterflies.

Documentation is an important part of inquiry because it teaches children the value of observable evidence and encourages them to notice details as they track changes over time. Children can record observations of experiments in notebooks by drawing pictures, adding photos, making hash marks when they count, or copying the numbers on a tape measure. This will assist children in making evaluations and seeing connections between cause and effect during experiments. Children can then use the journal as a tool for sharing their discoveries and knowledge with others. Learning to communicate ideas and knowledge helps children develop the skills they need to think critically, collaborate, and negotiate with others in a group.

Source: *The California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2013).

SUPPORTING MATH SKILLS

Math is in everything children do. Whether it is setting the table for meals, building with blocks, reading a book, playing hopscotch, drawing, or cleaning up; math is everywhere. Think about the activities you plan each day and the variety of materials that are available to children. What opportunities for learning math concepts are available in your curriculum and environment?

Reflecting on what your program offers children helps you provide them with meaningful learning experiences and challenges you to be a creative and intentional educator. Consider the following questions regarding math learning in your program.

- What real-life settings can you set up in the environment to provide a context for counting and doing arithmetic?
- What could be added to the physical environment to promote children's learning of measurement concepts and skills?
- What materials in the environment engage children in exploring and manipulating shapes?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume I* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

RECIPES

Vegetarian **French Onion Mushroom Soup**

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 2 yellow onions, peeled and thinly sliced
- Salt to taste
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 5 cups of water
- 6 ounces Gruyere cheese, grated
- French bread, sliced (optional)

Directions

Place the olive oil, butter, onions, and a few pinches of salt in a medium pot and cook it over medium-low heat until it is softened, for about five minutes. Spread the onions out into an even layer on the bottom of the pot, turn the heat up to medium, and stir them occasionally for about ten to fifteen minutes, until they are caramelized. Turn the heat back down to medium-low and cook them for an additional fifteen minutes, stirring them occasionally. Add the mushrooms and continue cooking until the mushrooms are softened, about ten minutes. Add the water and turn the heat up to medium-high until it begins to simmer. Continue to cook for about five to seven minutes. Add your preferred amount of salt and stir the soup. Divide the soup into bowls. Top with a handful of shredded cheese and cover them so that the cheese melts. Serve with a slice of French bread.

Source: Recipe adapted from **https://www.pbs.org/food/recipes/vegetarian-french-onion-mushroom-soup** in October 2025.

Developing Cognitive Skills

Make the projects below and use them to support the development of children's cognitive skills.

Activity: Pattern Book

Age group: Infants

What you need: Several sheets of black, white, and red construction paper, scissors, clear contact paper, hole-puncher, and yarn.

What you do: Cut the red and white paper into different-sized basic shapes. Glue the red and white shapes onto each side of the black construction paper to create patterns. After they have dried, cover both sides of each page with clear contact paper (or laminate). Punch holes in the left side of each page and use the yarn to bind the pages into a book. Hold an infant in your lap as you talk about the patterns in the book and slowly turn each page. Point to shapes and colors as you name and count them.

What they learn: It takes about a year for an infant's vision to fully develop. Looking at pictures of simple patterns in bold colors helps them learn to focus on objects and track movement. Talking and reading to infants builds their thinking and language skills.

Activity: Seek and Find

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: Large plastic animals, a sandbox or sensory tub with sand, plastic shovels, and plastic buckets.

What you do: Before children arrive, bury the animals in the sandbox or sensory tub. Give toddlers a bucket and shovel. Invite them to dig. As they find the animals ask them the name of the animal, what sound it makes, and how it moves. Ask them to place the animals they find in their bucket and count them together when they are done.

What they learn: Toddlers learn about cause and effect by filling up and dumping out the contents of their buckets. Searching for hidden animals encourages them to explore their environment and draw connections between objects and the words associated with them. Use this activity as an opportunity to practice counting and introduce math vocabulary, such as the words empty and full.

Activity: Geo-Board

Age group: Preschool

What you need: A large, sturdy piece of cardboard, a variety of different buttons, a hot glue gun with glue (adult use only), scissors, and thin yarn.

What you do: Create the geo-board by gluing the buttons with a glue gun onto the heavy cardboard. Cut twelve-inch lengths of thin yarn. Give each child a piece of yarn. Ask them what shapes they can make on the geo-board. Let them take turns figuring out how to wrap their string around the buttons to make squares, rectangles, triangles, circles, or diamonds. Once children are familiar with how the geo-board works, place it in the math area for further exploration.

What they learn: Children practice exploring the properties of shapes by figuring out how to create them using yarn. They can also practice identifying each other's shapes if they work in pairs.

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Developing **Cognitive Skills**

Activity: Budget This, Budget That

Age group: School Age

What you need: Calculators, newspapers or flyers with grocery coupons (or pretend coupons you create), paper, pencils, kid-safe scissors, simple recipes, and a grocery price list.

What you do: Select a few simple recipes children are familiar with. Write out the recipes. On another piece of paper, make a grocery price list. Gather the children together and tell them you want them to practice shopping on a budget. Ask them to share their ideas about what the word "budget" means. Invite them to pick a recipe and make a grocery list for it. They can write down how much each item will cost and see if there are any coupons that match their items. They can use a calculator to add up the cost of their grocery items. Then, they can subtract the coupon savings and discover how much it would cost to make their recipe. Ask them if there are other ways besides coupons to save money. For example, shopping for fruits and vegetables that are in season is usually less expensive because there is a larger quantity available.

What they learn: Children use addition and subtraction skills as they learn the concept of budgeting money. They practice planning for expenses, finding ways to cut costs, and learn to save money. This activity can also boost empathy skills as children consider how their family members budget the money they earn.

ABOUT CHS

For 134 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at **www.chs-ca.org**.

If you would like additional copies of this newsletter to share with parents or other child care providers, please visit our website at **https://chs-ca.org/chs-newsletters-and-updates/child-care-provider-newsletter/**.

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