Math Activity
Fishbowl Math

setup
• The goal of this activity is for children to practice organizing, sorting, and seeing patterns by looking at and arranging small toys.
• Set up the fishbowl or other container on the table or floor.

dO IT TOGETHER
• You can begin this activity by either emptying the contents of the fishbowl onto the table or floor, or letting your child put her hand in and select five to ten objects from the fishbowl. You should also select objects so you are both playing the game.

• Spend some time looking at and handling your objects. Talk about what you see in your own collection and each other’s. Ask questions like “What color is your little fish? Great! Do you see any other toys that have yellow in them? Do you see any other fish?” You can let your child decide which category she would like to put her fish into: color (yellow) or animal (fish).

• In this activity, your child may want to talk about the objects, make up little stories, or just play with them. These are all valid ways to explore and get familiar with the objects and have a lot of fun too! If your child has a little car that she is rolling around on the floor, you could ask, “Can my car ride along with your car? Can you find any other cars that would like to join our parade?”

• For an older child, you can ask her to describe her objects, giving her leading questions, if needed, such as “How many legs do your animals have?”

• Ask your child to identify what some of the different objects have in common. Then ask if she can sort them on her own or line them up according to a particular characteristic. For example, “You have shown me three green pom-poms. Is there anything else in your collection that has green in it? Is there anything else that’s round?”

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DO MORE OF IT!

- **Family Fishbowl.** Create and expand your family fishbowl by looking for objects from around the house to add to your collection. Ask your child to find a few items she wants to include. You can add all kinds of small, child-safe objects such as ribbon, cork, shells, and crayons. Make the sorting game a family activity where you trade with one another to get as many objects of a particular type in your own collections as possible. If your child is having trouble coming up with categories, ask her to pick out her favorite object and identify all of its characteristics: color, shape, texture, number of parts (legs, eyes, wheels), use, and so on.

- **Sorting Everywhere.** Whenever you find yourselves stuck in a long line at the supermarket or waiting in traffic, remember that you can play the sorting game wherever you are! Think of a category like pets, toys, the color blue, or sneakers. Together, you and your child locate as many items in that category as you can find around you. You can be very creative with your choices. Is a stuffed animal a pet? Can a shopping basket be a toy? This is a great way to really dig in to thinking and talking about categories.

**BOOKS**

- *Sort It Out!* by Barbara Mariconda
- *Sorting at the Market (Acorn: Math Around Us)* by Tracey Steffora
- *Heads* by Matthew Van Fleet

**OTHER RESOURCES**

- Visit your local library.
- Visit your local museum, nature center, zoo, or aquarium.
- Check out Brain Building Zones for local events in Massachusetts at [http://brainbuildinginprogress.org/event-calendar](http://brainbuildinginprogress.org/event-calendar).
- Check out [www.resourcesforearlylearning.org](http://www.resourcesforearlylearning.org) and [www.peepandthebigwideworld.org](http://www.peepandthebigwideworld.org).

**MATERIALS**

- Plastic fishbowl or other clear container
- Assorted 1”–2” child-friendly objects: five or ten each with common attributes, such as shape (toy bird) or color (green pom-pom), and a few individual items, such as a green plastic tree or a toy car

**Learning Guideline:** PreK-LS1-4: Use their five senses in their exploration and play to gather information.

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