



For ages 3-10

Financial adventures at home

By Dr. Alistair Bryce-Clegg



Contents

	Foreword	01-02
01	Understanding budgeting through play	03-12
02	Saving made simple (and fun!)	13-24
03	Turning everyday moments into money lessons	25-36
04	Exploring maths through play	37-48

Foreword

A note from Dr. Alistair Bryce-Clegg

Hello, and welcome!

I'm Dr. Alistair Bryce-Clegg, and I've spent over 30 years working in early childhood education. Currently, I work as an International Early Years Consultant and Trainer, and I've had the privilege of writing 28 books focusing on early childhood education and development. You might also know me from Channel 4's BAFTA-winning series, *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*.

I'm passionate about helping children reach their full potential, and this drive continues to shape everything I do, whether I'm working with governments on early years policy or helping parents like you foster a love for learning in their children.

I've worked with Bank of Scotland to create this booklet, drawing on cutting-edge research and my years of experience to offer fun, engaging activities that teach children key life skills – particularly around managing money. The activities are designed to grow with your child, adapting to different ages and developmental stages.

Let's get started on your **Financial Adventure at Home!**

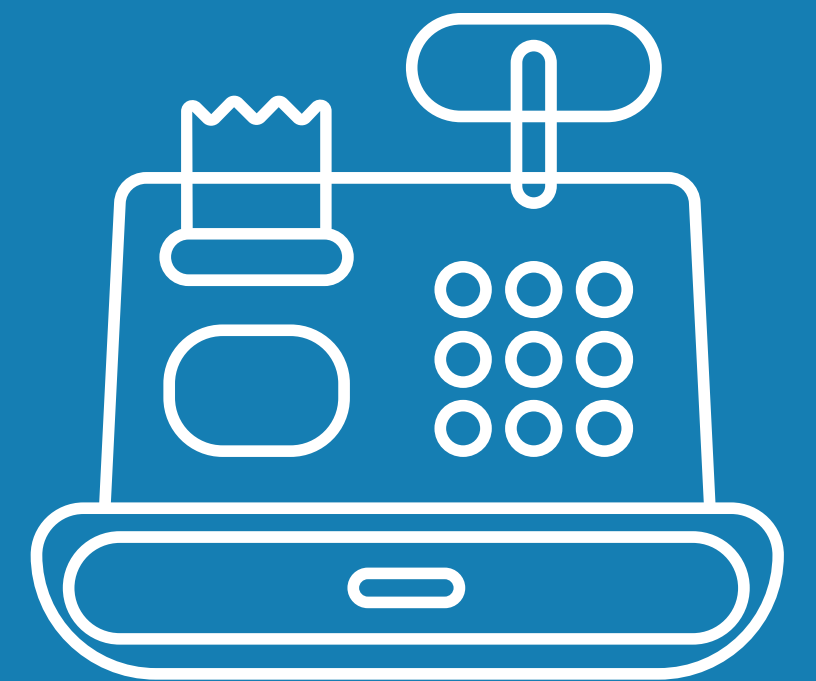
Section 1

Understanding budgeting through play

Young children learn best through hands-on experiences and experimentation.

Activities like budgeting with blocks help them develop 'executive function' skills – such as planning, problem-solving, and the ability to delay gratification.

These activities target the age range in which children begin to develop symbolic thinking, but still struggle with abstract concepts. By using objects like blocks, children can visualise quantities and budgeting in a way they understand.



Budgeting - Have we got enough?

The activity, explained

Budgeting might sound complex. But, with this playful activity, even young children can learn about managing resources. We'll use a favourite construction set to teach them about planning – and using what they have available to meet goals.



What you'll need:

- A set of blocks or construction pieces
- Pictures of simple models to build
- For older children: play money or tokens and price tags for different pieces



What to do:

1. **Choose a model:** Ask your child to pick one or two models from the pictures. Talk about what blocks they'll need to make it.
2. **Plan together:** For younger children, the focus is on gathering the right blocks and deciding whether they 'have enough' to complete the model. Use phrases like, 'Shall we check if we've got enough small pieces for the roof?'



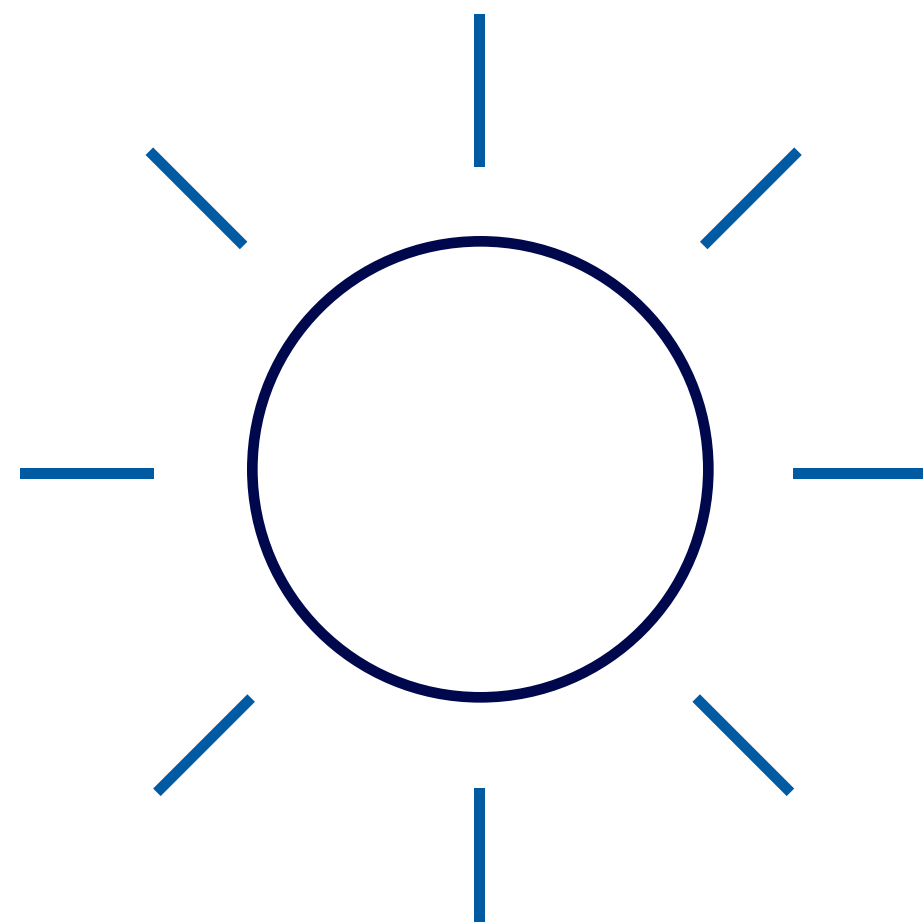
Make it more challenging:

1. **Add currency:** Give them a set amount of play money or tokens and ask them to 'buy' blocks. They'll need to plan carefully and make trade-offs, deciding which pieces are essential and which are optional. For example, 'Do you need more large blocks, or could you use extra small ones to finish the walls?'
2. **Manage multiple models:** Give them two models to complete with a limited budget. They'll need to balance resources across both projects.
3. **Introduce discounts:** Offer discounts for buying in bulk or include rare pieces that cost more but could improve their model.

Teddy bears' picnic

The activity, explained

Who doesn't love a teddy bear picnic? But even teddy bears must stick to a budget. This activity lets your child plan a fun feast for their cuddly friends, all while learning about spending limits and making choices.



What you'll need:

- A few teddy bears or soft toys
- A blanket for the picnic
- Paper, pens, and toy money or tokens



What to do:

1. **Set the budget:** Tell your child how much money they have to spend on the picnic.
2. **Make a shopping list:** Write down everything they want to buy for the picnic - like sandwiches, drinks, and maybe even a treat or two.
3. **Compare needs vs. wants:** Help them figure out what's essential and what's just for fun. For example, 'Do the teddies really need cupcakes and biscuits, or is one treat enough?'



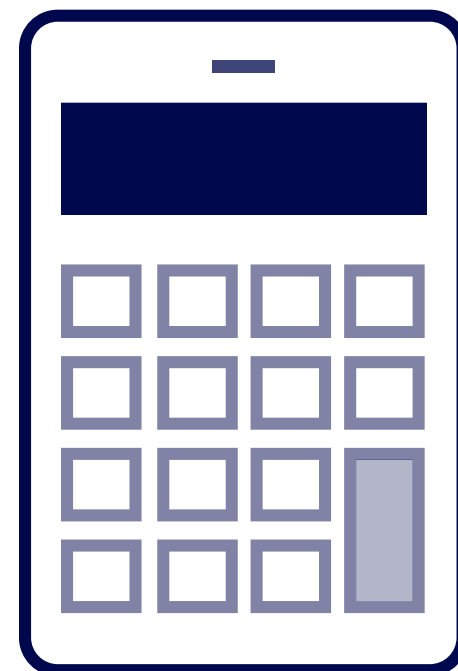
Make it more challenging:

Let them look up the prices of real snacks online or from your shopping receipts. They can add up the costs and make decisions based on a real-life budget before they even visit the store.

Pet care budget

The activity, explained

Involve children in budgeting for pet care extras, like treats or toys, to help them understand spending on essentials and prioritising within a budget.



What you'll need:

- A list of pet items (e.g. treats, toys)
- A small budget or set amount of money



What to do:

- 1. Plan the budget:** Talk to your child about what your pet might need and decide on a set amount of money to spend.
- 2. Choose items:** Let your child help decide which items to buy, discussing which items are essential and which are extra.
- 3. Make purchases:** If possible, take your child to the pet shop or show online options, letting them see the costs and make spending decisions.



Make it more challenging:

Introduce the concept of recurring expenses, like food or medicine, versus one-time purchases like toys, to deepen their understanding of budgeting and prioritisation.

Did you know?

Even young children can learn budgeting basics.

By understanding that they have a limited amount of something, whether it's blocks, snacks, or other resources, your children will form the foundation for money smarts. This early experience with limited resources helps teach young children about decision-making and prioritising.¹

Mistakes are key to learning.

Children learn by making sense of their experiences. When they call a bus a 'car' because it has wheels, they're using what they know and testing it out. Mistakes help them refine their thinking.

Playing shop helps your child manage money.

When children pretend to run a shop or plan a picnic with a budget, they're learning about spending, saving, and how to prioritise. It's a great way to build decision-making skills.²

¹ [Source:](#) Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2011). Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function.

² [Source:](#) National Association for the Education of Young Children



Section 2

Saving made simple (and fun!)

Saving can be exciting. Especially when you turn it into a challenge.

From a developmental psychology perspective, engaging children in goal setting and tracking their progress taps into the growing sense of autonomy we experience during our early years of development. In fact, according to psychologist Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, during our early school years, children experience a crucial developmental window to acquire a healthy sense of autonomy.



The savings challenge chart

The activity, explained

In this activity, your child will learn to set a savings goal and track their progress using a colourful chart – fostering a sense of achievement and mastery.



What you'll need:

- A large piece of paper or a poster board
- Markers or stickers
- A small jar or piggy bank



What to do:

- 1. Set a goal:** Ask your child what they'd like to save for – a toy, a trip, or something else (keep the goal achievable for this activity to be a teachable moment).
- 2. Create the chart:** Imagine your savings goal as a ladder or a set of stairs, with each rung or step representing an amount saved. At the very top of the chart is your goal – the total amount you want to save. Each time you put aside money, you move up one step, getting closer to the top. Let's say each step means you've saved £1. So: if you save £5, you'd move up five steps on the chart, and you can capture this progress by drawing on it. This makes it easy for children to see how every £1 adds up.
- 3. Check-ins:** Every time they add to their savings, let them colour in a step or add a sticker to the chart. Talk about how close they are to their goal, so that the progress becomes easily noticeable.



Make it more challenging:

Teach them about interest by offering an extra reward when they reach certain milestones. For example, after saving £10, you could add 50p of interest as a bonus.

Pocket money magic

The activity, explained

Pocket money is a fantastic way to introduce your child to the concept of earning and spending. You can give your child the chance to earn extra for doing age-appropriate jobs around the house such as setting the table, watering plants, folding laundry or sweeping. Let them take charge of their own budget and make choices. The premise works whether your little one is saving for something extra special or just a few small treats.



What you'll need:

- A regular pocket money routine
- A small wallet, purse, or money jar



What to do:

1. **Set the routine:** Decide how much pocket money your child will receive and how often.
2. **Spending vs. saving:** Help them decide if they want to spend it right away or save up for something bigger. For example, 'Would you rather buy a small toy now, or save for a bigger one next month?'



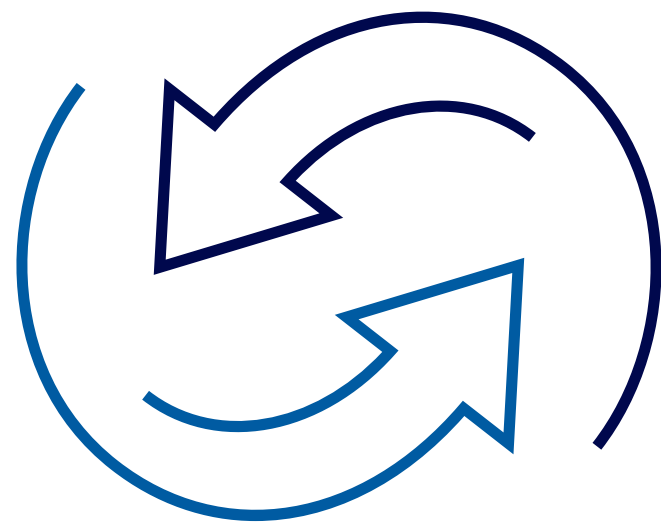
Make it more challenging:

Challenge them to save for a larger item and track their progress. Let them work out how long it would take to save a chosen amount, or to save for something they want, using the pocket money routine you've set. Encourage them to think about needs versus wants.

Toy swap

The activity, explained

Organise a toy swap day at home or with friends to help children learn the value of items and the concept of bartering. Trading toys introduces children to the idea that items have different values, and that trading can be a fun, cost-effective way to enjoy new things without spending money.



What you'll need:

- Toys for swapping
- A designated swap area



What to do:

1. **Gather toys:** Ask each child to bring a few toys they no longer use to the swap day.
2. **Discuss value:** Talk with the children about which toys might be worth more or less and why.
3. **Make a trade:** Encourage them to practice negotiating trades with friends or siblings, reinforcing the idea of value and bartering.



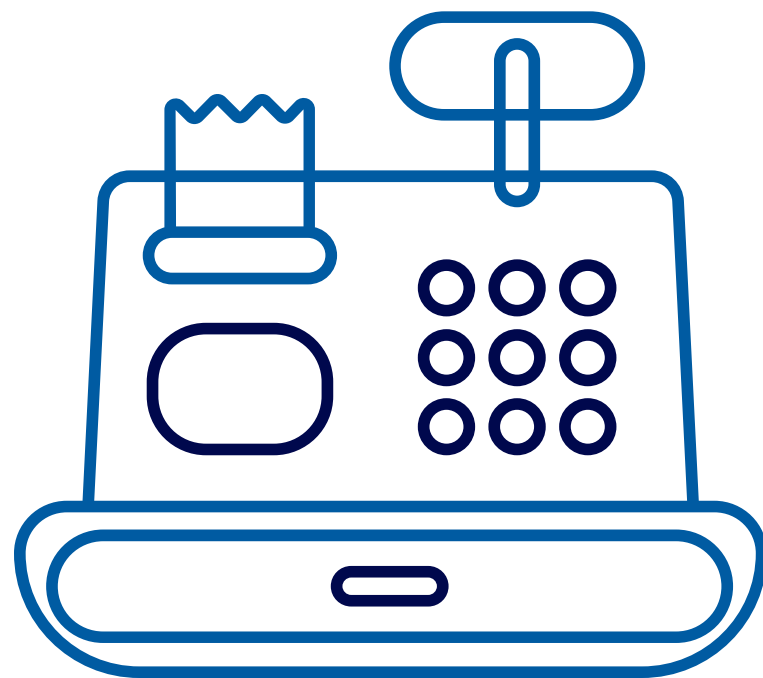
Make it more challenging:

Have children write down reasons why a toy might be more or less valuable. Introduce concepts like condition, popularity, and age of the toy to deepen their understanding of value.

Snack shop at home

The activity, explained

Create a pretend snack shop where children can 'buy' snacks with toy money or small coins. This activity teaches budgeting in a fun, everyday context.



What you'll need:

- Small snacks or treats
- Toy money or small coins
- A table for the shop setup



What to do:

1. **Set a budget:** Give each child a set amount of toy money or small coins.
2. **Set up the shop:** Display the snacks on the table and assign prices to each item.
3. **Make purchases:** Encourage children to 'shop' within their budget, helping them practice decision-making and prioritising.



Make it more challenging:

Add price variations or discounts for buying multiple items to introduce concepts like bulk buying and value comparisons.

Did you know?

Your child learns better when they move.

It's easy to assume kids need to sit still to listen, but movement can actually help them focus. Wriggling and moving about allows them to use their energy while paying attention.

Young children don't understand that some things can't be put back how they were.

Does your child seem shocked when the flower they took off a plant can't simply be placed back on? They might be devastated when they can't put a bit of a broken toy in position and see it magically fixed. One of the ways we all learn about the world is through cause and effect, and one thing your child has learnt is that some things can't be changed - and then changed back again.



Section 3

Turning everyday moments into money lessons

Simple, everyday activities like shopping or making lists can be powerful tools for cognitive development.

These tasks help to build working memory (the brain's ability to hold onto information) and cognitive flexibility (the ability to switch between tasks and to think about multiple things at once).

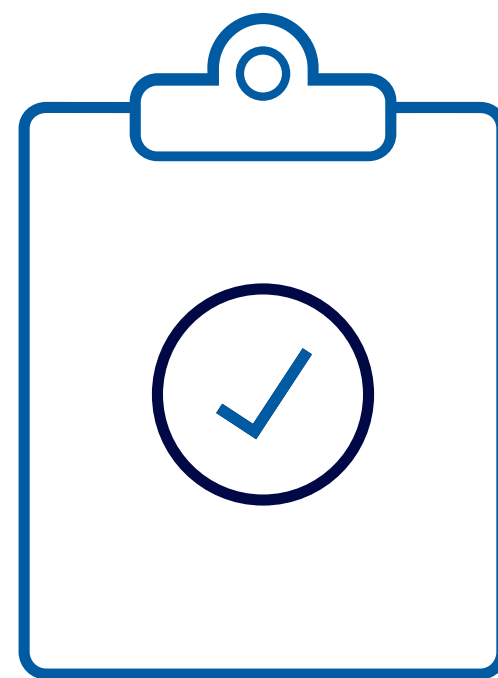
So, when you help your child compare prices at the shop, you're not just teaching them about money. You're also building their capacity to think critically with your support.



Shopping lists and spending smarts

The activity, explained

Now, you can turn a regular shopping trip into a learning experience. In this activity, your child can help you write the list, compare prices, and decide which items are the best value. For older children, you can even introduce real budgets to make it more challenging.



What you'll need:

- A pen and paper to create a shopping list
- For older children: add real money and a calculator



What to do:

1. **Write the list:** Ask your child to help you make a shopping list.
2. **Compare prices:** While shopping with your child, talk about different options and prices. Help them choose which item offers the best value.



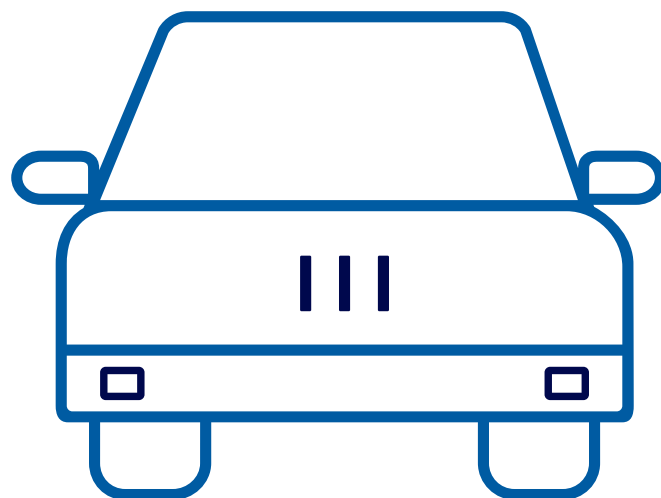
Make it more challenging:

Give them a set budget to manage and let them take charge of selecting items for the family shop. They can use a calculator to add up prices as they go.

Our family's money book

The activity, explained

Children are often fascinated by the thought that the adults around them were once children too. This interest in the people around them can help to teach them about saving for the longer term. You'll go through old photos of yourself and the family, linking key memories to relevant financial milestones. This will help your child to understand how money and finances play a significant part in all of our lives.



What you'll need:

- Childhood photographs
- Pictures of things you used savings to buy - you may include a photo of you on the day you passed your driving test, your first car or the day you moved into your first home.



What to do:

1. **Look through the photographs together:** If you know who opened your first savings account, tell your child about that, and look at some photographs of you at around the same age.
2. **Create space for dialogue:** If you remember visiting a branch to pay money into a savings account, talk to them about it and show them some photographs.
3. **Make a story:** From when you or an adult first opened your savings account, to when you began to use the savings, make a story of all the key events (include times when you found it hard to keep saving and how that felt).



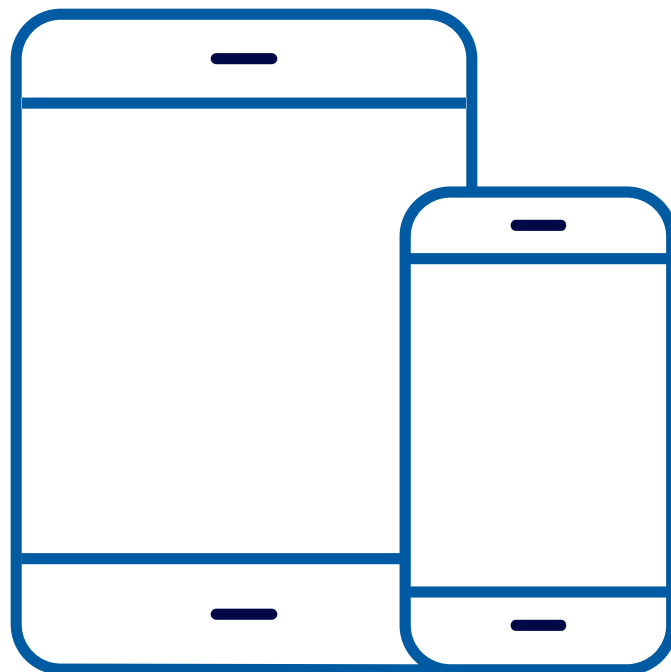
Make it more challenging:

Talk about how you save now, so your child can see that saving is still part of your life. Ask your child to anticipate how saving will feel as they get older.

Let's sell things online

The activity, explained

If you usually sell things you no longer wear or use through an app or online, involve them in listing items, packaging them and sending them off.



What you'll need:

- Items to sell
- Smartphone or camera
- Packaging materials (boxes, bubble wrap, tape)
- Selling app or website account



What to do:

1. Choose items together to sell
2. Take clear photos of items
3. Write descriptions together
4. Research similar items to set fair prices
5. Package items safely and send off
6. Track the money earned
7. Monitor digital payments
8. Plan what to do with earnings



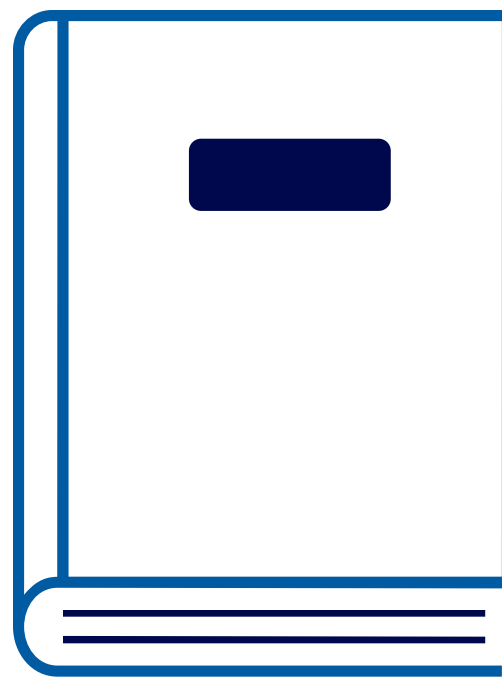
Make it more challenging:

Ask older children to create their own 'Mini Business Plan'. They can set a savings goal; then roughly calculate how many items they'd need to sell to reach it. They could also keep a spreadsheet of sales and earnings to track progress toward that goal.

Library adventure

The activity, explained

Take children on a library visit to explore and borrow books. This introduces them to the idea of free resources and saving money while enjoying new stories.



What you'll need:

- Library membership (if required)
- A list of books or topics your child might enjoy



What to do:

- 1. Plan a visit:** Take your child to the library and explain that borrowing books is free.
- 2. Choose books together:** Let your child select a few books, emphasising that they don't need to spend money to enjoy new stories.
- 3. Discuss savings:** Talk about how using free resources like libraries can help save money and allow for a variety of experiences.



Make it more challenging:

Encourage older children to create a list of books they'd like to read over time, helping them learn to prioritise and plan their reading choices.

Did you know?

Teaching kids money smarts builds confidence.

Research suggests that children who are encouraged to set and work towards savings goals are more likely to feel a sense of achievement and confidence in their abilities. This builds resilience and patience, which are valuable life skills.³

Your child is more interested than you think.

Talking to your child, in a way that is appropriate for their understanding, about your budgeting, spending and saving will help them to learn about how finances are part of daily life. It will also interest them so long as it's delivered in an engaging way.

Research shows that children who participate in selling activities develop better negotiation skills and value perception. They also learn delayed gratification - a crucial skill linked to better academic performance and financial decision-making in later life.

³ [Source: American Psychological Association](#)

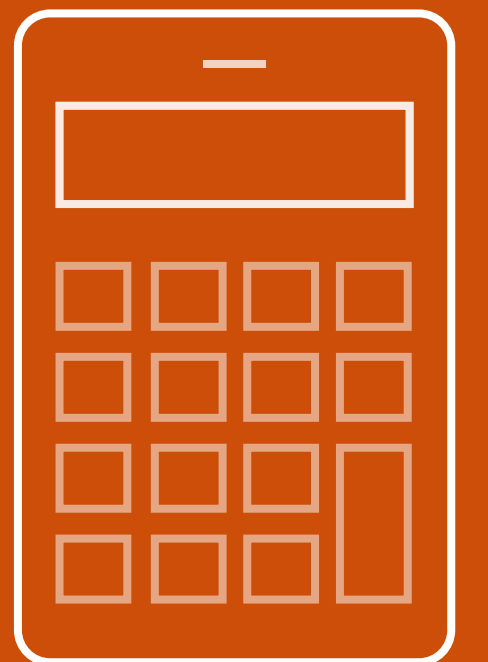


Section 4

Exploring maths through play

Maths is about more than numbers.

In fact, for a mathematical foundation, you don't need numbers at all. Sorting and classifying objects during play develops logical-mathematical thinking, which is key to understanding numbers and patterns later on. These activities help children understand concepts like quantity, which are foundational for maths.



Pre-counting fun

The activity, explained

Through activities like sorting, children learn to group objects, recognise patterns, and develop their counting skills. Additionally, these tasks build fine motor skills (coordination of small muscles, like those in the hands), which are crucial for building and perfecting their writing skills and also manipulating objects. So: sorting, classifying, and comparing objects are essential pre-counting skills that help your child understand quantities and patterns, laying the foundation for future mathematical learning.



What you'll need:

- Toys or everyday objects for sorting (blocks, buttons, cars, etc.)
- Baskets or bowls for grouping them by size, colour, or type



What to do:

1. Sort and classify: Let your child sort their toys by colour, size, or type. Ask fun questions like, 'Do you think there are more red cars or blue ones?'



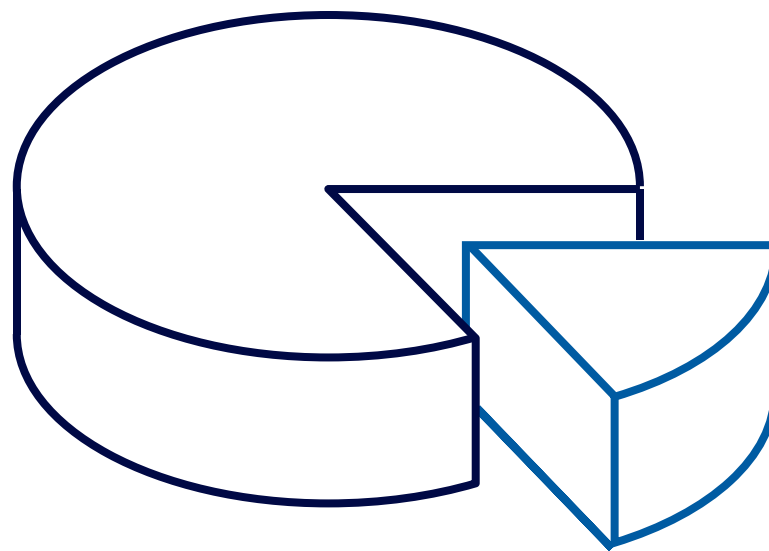
Make it more challenging:

Introduce overlapping categories e.g. objects that are both soft and blue, or that are both small and square-shaped, for example. Additionally, create a Venn diagram getting your child to place those overlapping items in the middle and discussing those differences with them.

Comparing quantities in everyday life

The activity, explained

Turn everyday activities into learning moments by using comparative language. This helps your child understand more and less – essential for grasping numbers and quantities later on.



What you'll need:

- Everyday items (like fruit, toys, or kitchen items)



What to do:

1. **Compare items:** During everyday tasks, ask your child to compare quantities. For example, while setting the table, you can ask, 'Do we need more cups or plates?'



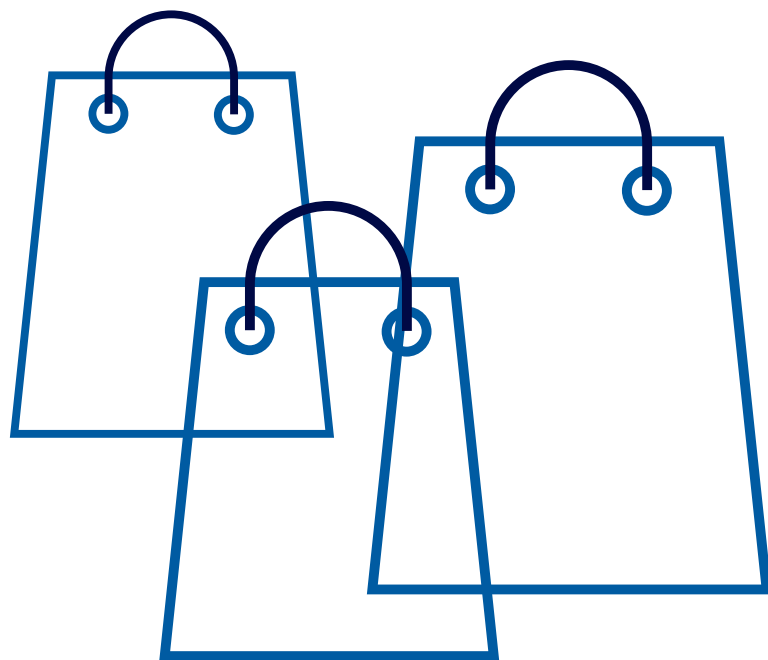
Make it more challenging:

Introduce fractions or ratios. For instance: 'We've got half as many forks as plates – how many more forks do we need?'

Let's go shopping

The activity, explained

Playing shops helps your child think about spending and earning money (depending if they are the customer or shopkeeper). You can use anything that interests your child to make your shop, and if they like playing cafes, vets or travel agents, then include paying when you play these games.



What you'll need:

- A selection of objects to 'sell' - this can be anything that will interest your child, for example, toy groceries, toy cars, teddy bears, pens and pencils (or maybe something different each time you play)
- A table
- A box (or a toy till)
- Objects to exchange - you could use bricks, counters or coins
- Pens
- Paper or sticky notes



What to do:

- 1. Help your child set up shop:** Put the items they are going to 'sell' on the table.
- 2. Make signs:** Ask them what they think they might need and help them to think about the different aspects - open/closed signs, price labels, signs for tills, shop name and so on. Write the signs and labels for the shop together - encourage your child to do this as independently as possible.
- 3. Create the till:** If you are using a box rather than a toy till, draw some numbers on it and cut a flap so your child can put the objects, or money in it.



Make it more challenging:

Before the activity begins, get your child to decide on a budget, if they're playing the customer. At the end, ask them how much of that budget they spent and how much they were able to save (if any). If playing the shopkeeper, ask them to calculate their profits and think about how much of that they would spend or save.

Tap the card

The activity, explained

You could introduce the idea of paying with a card, by having a bank where you keep the objects that are being exchanged for purchases in the shop.



What you'll need:

- Card/paper to make pretend bank cards
- Toy shop items with price tags
- Notebook for keeping track of balances
- Pens/markers
- Calculator (optional)



What to do:

- 1. Set up a 'bank' area:** Name some boxes and place equal amounts of blocks/counters in each box.
- 2. Create bank cards:** Using card/paper, help your child to create some bank cards.
- 3. Set up shop:** Fill your shop with priced items, take turns being shopkeeper and customer. Use the card to make purchases, keeping track of the remaining balance.



Make it more challenging:

Become the bank manager. Keep a written record of everyone's spending. When they buy something, subtract the cost from their total. When they sell something, add the amount to their total. At the end of play, check if your calculations match the blocks in their bank boxes.

Did you know?

Sorting objects helps young children understand maths.

Sorting objects by size, colour, and shape helps young children develop 'number sense,' which is crucial for understanding maths concepts.⁴ This can help them develop a strong foundation for understanding finance basics as they grow and develop.

Real-life situations help children learn maths.

Comparing everyday items like fruits or utensils teaches them about quantities and prepares them for more complex math concepts like addition and subtraction.

Role-playing activities help children become better negotiators.

Children who engage in role-playing activities, like running a shop, enhance their language and social skills. Acting as both buyer and seller helps them learn how to communicate needs, ask questions, and negotiate - all important skills for future interactions.⁵

Money smarts develop at age seven.

By age seven, children already start forming money habits that can last into adulthood. Introducing concepts like digital payments and budgeting in a playful way gives them a head start in understanding modern financial tools.⁶

⁴ Source: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)

⁵ Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

⁶ Source: University of Cambridge

