ACTIVITY IN FOCUS: 22-36 months

Sorting laundry

Matching

Matching requires children to look carefully, comparing two or more objects - they must decide if the features of the objects are the same. Learning to do this lays the foundations for mathematical learning which will come later, e.g. children will need to learn what values are equal to each other when doing sums (=). You can help by giving children opportunities to match by using popular first board games, e.g. lotto games and colour-matching games. Card games such as pairs can also be played, and you can easily make the playing cards yourself - you could even use photos of children in the group.

Sorting

Once children can match, they can begin to learn how to sort. Sorting is the process of comparing objects and deciding what features make them the same or different (or what links and separates them). Children can sort according to shape, colour, size, type and so on. They can sort with many resources including beads, buttons, toys, etc. Sorting at tidying up time is an example of a naturally occurring everyday activity.

Why not try a sorting role play with children towards the end of this age? It’s a fun challenge and involves using mathematics for an everyday purpose.

What you will need:

- Laundry basket
- Selection of laundry including several pairs of socks in different colours, sizes and patterns, and a few odd socks. There should also be enough similar items to sort together, e.g. six children’s t-shirts, four skirts.
- You may like to change your appearance in some way to show that you are in character if you work in a group setting – perhaps by wearing an apron that covers the uniform you wear for work.

What to do:

1. Enter the home corner carrying the basket full of laundry. Say hello to the children and tell them your character name. Explain that you have just picked the laundry in from the washing line in your garden.
2. Ask children to help you to sort it out into sets so it’s ready to put away. Demonstrate this, and be sure to show children how to find socks that match and pair them up.
3. At the end of the activity, acknowledge that there are some odd socks left over and that you will have to look for them. Ask for suggestions of where to look. (Answers might include the washing machine, on the washing line, in the linen basket etc).
4. Thank children for their efforts and exit, explaining that you are off to put the washing away.

Extension ideas:

- You may like to set up a makeshift washing line in the garden and hang out some odd socks for children to find, and/or hide some odd socks in the home corner washing machine.
- You may like to ask children to sort laundry into other types of sets, e.g. by colour, or to extend the activity for older children in mixed age groups, by winter or summer clothes.