

Doing things in a big way

Young children learn with all their senses and with their whole bodies. They learn better and for longer if they can touch and feel, listen and see, shout and whisper, jump and run... Doing things in a big way gives them a chance to do all these things. And young children are drawn to things on a giant scale.



Big writing

- Go on a hunt for big writing when you are out and about. Look for the largest shop and business name sign, and notices such as SALE. Which is the largest SALE notice you can see in the street? Notice the huge signs painted on the road: BUS STOP; LOOK LEFT. Search for enormous posters on hoardings, and spot words and pictures that tell you what the poster is about. Talk with your child about the signs and why they are there. See if they can spot the same word in lots of different places. Point out which direction you read the word in.



Read and write together

A magazine for parents
and children aged 3-5

- Hunt for huge letters in the same way. Look for P for parking, B&B, L for learner, H for hospital, I for information, C for congestion charging. Your child can look for letters that they know.
- Provide your child with a big household painting brush and a bucket of water. Invite them to 'write' signs on an outside wall or paving stone with the brush and water.



Big alphabet

- You can get large, soft, plastic alphabet letters to wet and stick on the bathroom tiles to use while your child is in the bath. Spell out your child's name. Write little messages and read them out. Stick up words that you have noticed when you are out and about.
- Make (or buy) a set of alphabet letters by writing each letter with felt tip on a sheet of paper. Tie a length of string across the room and, together, peg on some letters to make your child's name or another familiar word. You could remove one of the letters while your child shuts their eyes, and ask them to say which letter is missing. Or shuffle the letters round and see if your child can put them in the right order.



- Make a big alphabet book. Use card for the cover, and newspaper or plain or wrapping paper for the pages. Make a page for each letter of the alphabet. Find and cut out examples of that letter in magazines. Your child may begin to notice the difference between capital letters and small letters, and some of the different ways each letter is printed.

- When it is your child's birthday, or a special day, string up large letters saying HAPPY BIRTHDAY, or WELCOME, or CONGRATULATIONS.
- Take turns to write a large letter of the alphabet with your finger on each other's back. The other person has to guess what the letter was.



Big sounds

- Provide your child with dressing-up clothes and a toy microphone or cardboard tube. Set up part of the room as a stage area. Supply some music on a tape or CD, or use any musical instruments you have. Encourage your child to be a 'rapper' and to invent songs with rhythm and rhyme. They can prepare for a 'performance'.



- When you are out and about, choose a letter sound, and see how many things you and your child can spot beginning with that sound. Shout them out when you see them: *Bag! Baby! Bike! Banana!*
- When you are out, try splitting movement words into their sound syllables. Say, for example, *Let's b-o-p* (where you say the sounds, not the letter names), *j-u-m-p*, *s-k-i-p*, *r-u-n...*

Read and write together and *Count and figure it out together* is published by the Basic Skills Agency in partnership with local authorities and distributed by local authorities to schools. It is written by Sheila Ebbutt.

Big stories

- Tell your child traditional tales such as *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, or *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, or *The Gingerbread Man*. Tell them over and over again. Your child can join in with the repeated phrases. Then give your child big props to act out the story. For *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* you need three soft toys to represent the goats, and a monster to be the troll. Use a chair for the bridge, and a green scarf for the field. Your child can tell the story, acting it out in a big way as they go.
- Read your child stories about giants and giant things, such as:
 - *The Great Big Enormous Turnip*
 - *The Giant Jam Sandwich*
 - *Jack and the Beanstalk*
- Provide your child with some props to act out these stories. For *Jack and the Beanstalk*, for example, provide some pebbles, a packet of seeds, some large Wellington boots, a stool or ladder, and so on. Outdoors, you could decide what makes the giant's castle, where Jack's house is, and what to use for the beanstalk. Join in the action by being the characters your child wants you to be.

Why?

Doing these activities will help your child to:

- begin to understand that print and writing conveys a message
- learn that writing is made up of letters
- begin to recognise some words and letters
- develop imaginative language
- listen for rhymes and rhythms in language
- begin to link sounds with letters of the alphabet.

All of these things will help them when they learn to read and write.

The Basic Skills Agency is the national development agency for basic skills in England and Wales. We are a registered charity and our mission is to help raise standards of basic skills.

Count and figure it out together

A magazine for parents and children aged 3-5

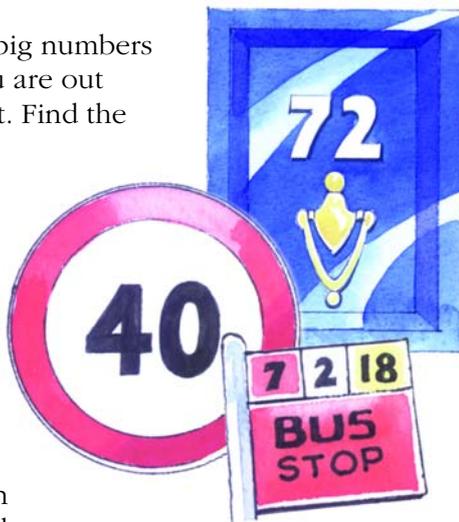
Young children love big numbers, even though they may not understand what the numbers mean. They also love exploring large shapes and spaces, and lifting big objects.

Big numbers

Talk to your child about numbers and find out what they know. Ask the following questions (and accept the answers) and you may get some surprises!

- ▶ How old do you think I am? (or an older relative or friend)
- ▶ How old is the oldest person you know?
- ▶ What is the biggest number you know?
- ▶ How far can you count?
- ▶ What number comes after one hundred? (one thousand, one million)
- ▶ How many beans do you think you can hold in your hand? (or grains of rice)
- ▶ What do you think our phone number is?

- Look for big numbers when you are out and about. Find the biggest number of the front doors in your street. Find the biggest number in the calendar.



- Copy your phone number by modelling the numbers with modelling dough or pipe cleaners. Find phone numbers in the telephone directory and enter them into a calculator display.

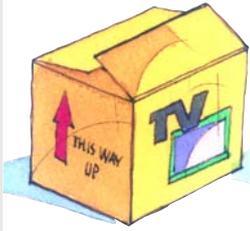
- Enter numbers into the microwave or the VCR. Make the display show the biggest number you can think of.
- Make a chain of paper clips as tall as yourself. How can we count them all?
- Look at newspapers and magazines. Find all the big numbers you can. Cut them out or draw a ring round them.



Big sounds

- Collect some pebbles and use a metal wastebin or saucepan. Ask your child to shut their eyes. Drop one pebble at a time into the metal container, and ask your child to count them in their head. Or count them together as you do it. Drop in a few, and ask your child to say how many you dropped altogether. Or ask, *Did I drop in more than four? Or less?* Now swap roles.
- Take turns to count together up to five or ten, or further. You say your number quietly; your child shouts theirs: *one, TWO, three, FOUR, five, SIX...* Start at different numbers. Try counting backwards. Try a different rhythm: *one, two, THREE, four, five, SIX...* Try clapping as well as shouting. Try jumping as well as shouting.
- Make a shaker with a small plastic bottle half-filled with dried beans and sealed up. Or a tin can with a lid half-filled with lentils. Make a drum with a wooden spoon and a saucepan. Invent rhythms such as: *two shakes, one drum, two shakes, one drum...* Find a way of recording the rhythms on paper.

Big boxes



In an outdoor or large indoor area, give your child some large empty cardboard boxes to play with, including a box or two big enough to climb inside. You can provide other things too, to inspire your child's play.

- Provide some old blankets or sheets, and some pegs and clips, to make a den, and to explore the idea of inside and outside, what it feels like to be inside a box, and what fits into the space.
- Give your child a torch to have inside the dark den to make different shaped shadows. What shadow does a twig make? Or a spoon or a fork?
- Have lots of boxes and things to fit inside them, such as plastic flowerpots, old magazines or old clothes. Suggest this is a packing station, and all the boxes need packing and stacking and labelling. Put or draw labels on the boxes with big felt-tip pens. Make up some postcodes to write on the boxes. You could wrap up the boxes first, using newspaper or used wrapping paper.
- Use odds and ends to make a building site: real bricks, bits of wood, plastic buckets, some sand, measuring tape... Now measure things, count how many bricks in a row and decide where the door should go.
- Make a training circuit with boxes, chairs, cushions and newspapers. Decide where to start and what the rules are: through the box, over the chair, between the cushions, under the newspaper... Are you allowed to touch the floor?
- Take the lids off three empty boxes. Draw a different shape on each box: a circle, a triangle and a rectangle. Collect smaller empty boxes, pots and plastic bottles. Stand back from the three boxes, and take turns to choose a box or pot and throw it into the box where it best belongs. For example, a tissue box goes with the rectangle, a yoghurt pot with the circle and a Toblerone box with the triangle.
- Take turns to throw a big ball into a big box. Can you get three balls in a row into the box? Step back three paces from the box and try again. Now try four paces...



Things to ask

- ▶ Does that fit easily? Is there much room left inside?
- ▶ Do you need a bigger or smaller box than that one?
- ▶ How can you make sure you can fit inside your box?
- ▶ How do you know what size piece of paper to choose for your box?
- ▶ What do you do after you've gone between the cushions?

Big and light, or big and heavy?

Young children often think that the bigger an object is, the heavier it is, and that a bigger object must be heavier than a smaller one. You can help your child by giving them different experiences.

- Give your child a huge polystyrene box to carry, or a big roll of bubble wrap, or a giant balloon. It may surprise them that they can do it!
- Supply two carrier bags and ask your child to put food boxes and tins, and other groceries, into the bags so that they feel as if they weigh the same. Put out some light and some heavy items. *Let's test this bag. It feels very heavy. Shall we take something out or put something in?*
- Collect some household items, such as packets of crisps, large empty plastic bottles, small full plastic bottles, tins, packets, potatoes and apples, plastic and metal cutlery. Have to hand two boxes that your child can hold in each hand. Take turns to choose one item to put in each box, to hold the boxes in either hand, and to say which is heavier and which is lighter. *I wonder which is heavier, this potato or this box of puffed wheat?*

Why?

Doing these activities will help your child to:

- ▶ begin to learn about big numbers
- ▶ count sounds and claps and jumps
- ▶ make repeating patterns with sounds
- ▶ learn what shapes are like, how they fit together and their sizes
- ▶ describe positions, such as 'next to', and movements, such as 'go between'
- ▶ get a feel for heavy and light.