Early numeracy
Numeracy - a basic component of education and life

Like literacy, numeracy is one of the most important things for young children to learn so that they can succeed in their later schooling and in life.

As with literacy, foundations for numeracy start well before children start schooling and continue in everyday activities out of school.

Families and members of children’s communities play a vital role in helping young children learn these skills.

Numeracy involves having the skills to use numbers and mathematical ideas and understand the ways these work in our lives. A numerate person is able to deal with mathematical information for their own purposes in everyday situations.

Young children begin to develop numeracy through their early experience of seeing numbers and mathematical information used in their homes and communities.

For example, as they move about in the world, they see signs, number shapes, things being measured and weighed and money being used to buy products.

During the early years, children have their own ways of dealing with mathematical ideas. They should be encouraged to use their own ways of explaining and recording number experiences.

Education needs to build on the experiences that children already have. The adults working with young children need to make connections between what children learn in the world and in their planned learning activities.

Here are some of the places that children might see numeracy information in their community:

- in catalogues
- on supermarket packages
- at the checkout
- on food at the take away
- on advertising

- on TV
- on scales for weighing things
- on calendars
- on number plates
- on clocks

- on houses and road side delivery addresses
- on the petrol pump
- on cards
- on computer games
Here are some of the things families can do to help their children with numeracy:

- show children the ways of using signs and representing places and distances
- get children to make up number stories about what they see and do - "I went to a party and six cousins, two uncles and three friends were there"
- count together setting the table
- check the calendar for the dates of special events
- add up how much groceries will cost
- measure and weigh when cooking
- compare prices on catalogue items
- read number plates
- check TV times for favourite programs
- play number games

Here are some examples of numeracy knowledge children will need as they commence schooling:

- how to count, read and write numbers
- how to begin to tell the time
- to know about big, small, long and short
- to understand about near and far, today, yesterday and tomorrow
- to learn about the names of the days, months and seasons
- to sequence things from big to small and work out how much will fit in a container
- to predict what is likely to happen from experience, for example, 'It will be night soon, then I'll sleep and it'll be morning'
Here are some ways families can help children as they develop 'school numeracy':

- Keep a record of important events in the child's life, talk about these experiences and the record of dates, times, places and people.
- Give them positive feedback when they remember and use numbers like their age, their address, phone and car numbers.
- Talk about numeracy at home in everyday settings.
- Look for numbers and numeracy information when you're out together.
- Encourage children to read and write numbers at home and label their drawings.
- Help them to work out how much things cost, how much change they will receive.

Children learn numeracy skills through:
- counting
- measuring
- weighing
- estimating
- moving around in space
- matching objects and numbers
- using words about mathematical ideas – long, short, high, low, near, far
- with other children, family and community