

Concepts

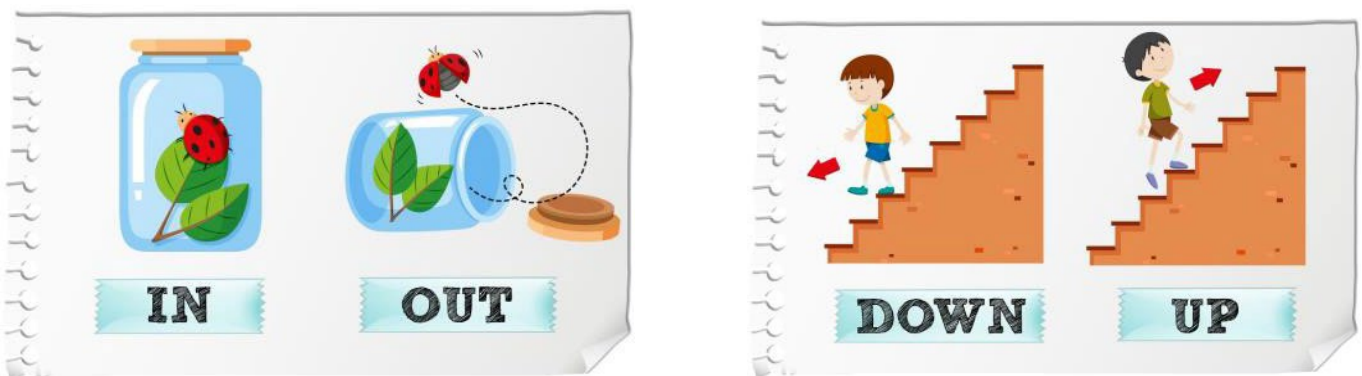
What are they?

The best way to explain concepts, is that they are words which help us to understand;

- location - e.g. up/down, behind/in front of
- number - e.g. more/less
- size - e.g. big/little
- time - e.g. before/after, first/last
- feelings - e.g. happy/sad.

Why are they important?

Concepts are used to describe and compare things. Learning to recognise and understand concepts will strengthen your child's vocabulary and help to build up their pre-reading and early mathematical skills. Learning concepts can be great fun and you can help at home too!



Understanding and using concepts

How you can help

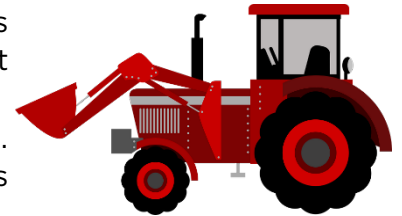
- Ask your child's teacher for a list of concepts coming up in Numeracy, Language and Literacy, World Around Us, R.E., etc. This may include concepts that your child hasn't yet mastered or been taught, for example few. Try to have daily conversations that include new words, e.g. 'I have a few things to buy in the shop before we go home'.
- If the topic is Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the child will need to understand the concepts hard and soft which relate to the beds and chairs, e.g. 'This bed is too hard', 'This bed is too soft.'
- Walk around and talk about different objects that are hard (cup, table, pen), and soft (teddy, towel, curtains). Encourage your child to feel the objects and notice that hard objects tend to feel cold, whereas soft objects are often warmer.

Easier activities

- Start by introducing one concept at a time, e.g. big/not big.
- Match items according to their colour, size, shape, feel, etc.
- Match pictures that are the same.

Advanced activities

- Talk about items not present, which draw upon your child's experience and knowledge of the world, e.g. 'What was that digger doing in the field yesterday?'
- Discuss the kind of describing words which might be used, e.g. 'Did you see the big wheels on the back and the small wheels on the front?'
- Discuss the properties of objects and how they can be related together, e.g. 'The ground is soft and the digger's bucket is hard, so it can dig deep holes in the ground.'



Understanding first and last

Why is this important?

First and last are concepts of time and sequencing. They refer to something happening before or after something else. They are also significant order concepts when creating sequences in Numeracy. You can do these activities with your child and their friends or siblings.

How you can help

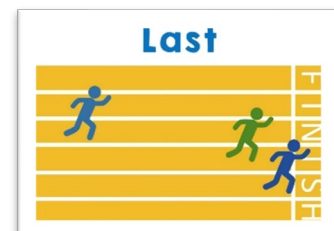
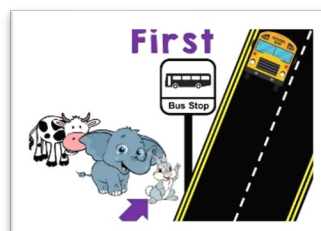
- Get the group to line up. Then ask your child to stand **first** or **last** in the line.
- If they are unsure, show them where to stand.
- Once you have given the instruction and your child has moved to the right place in the line, reinforce this by saying where they are, e.g. 'Yes, now you are **first**'.

Easier activities

- Use visual cues e.g. signing or pointing to where you want your child to stand after you give the instruction
- Work on one concept only to begin with e.g. **first**. When this is established, introduce last
- Link the idea of last to not first. This is how your child initially learns opposites.

Advanced activities

- Reduce the number of visual or verbal cues, repetition or help given
- Use toys and photos, e.g. toy animals lined up, photo of sports day or Olympics of the winner crossing the line
- With any of these activities, you can encourage your child to use the words first and last by asking, 'Where's Jody in the queue?', or, 'Where's the horse?' as the animals enter the field, etc.
- Link to time, e.g. 'What happened **first** in the story?', 'What happened **last**'?.'



Understanding same and different

Why is this important?

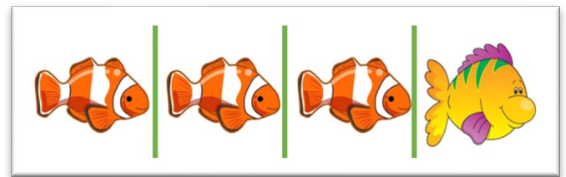
Same and different are important concepts used to describe similarities and differences between objects. Sorting and matching are the first skills in early years Numeracy. Visual discrimination of letter shapes which are the **same** or **different**, is one of the first skills learned in early years Literacy.

How you can help

- Take two catalogues and have fun finding pictures of objects that are exactly the **same**. Ask your child to point to pictures that are the **same**, or those which are **different**
- Look at all the SNAP cards in a box and find matching pairs.

Easier activities

- Start by introducing the concept same
- Matching the socks into pairs that are the **same**, or two biscuits that are the **same**
- Ask your child to sort their toys and make a matching pair of any two toys that are the **same**
- Ask your child to sort the pegs, by colour, shape or by touch. They can tell you if any two items at random are the **same** or **different**.



Advanced activities

- Introduce items that are different but only slightly, e.g. a red pencil and a blue pencil
- Encourage your child to tell you whether items are the **same** or **different**
- Encourage them to sort items, identifying the properties of each item, e.g.
- 'This pencil is long and red, but this pencil is long and blue. Their colours are **different**.'
- Play SNAP, slowly at first, then more quickly.



Understanding big and little/small

Why is this important?

It is important that children are able to describe objects. **Big** and **little/small** are often amongst the earliest adjectives (describing words) that children learn. Usually **big** is learned before **little/small**.

How you can help

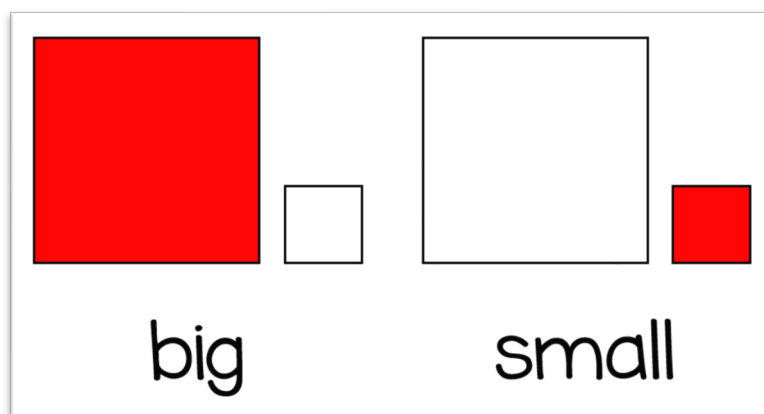
- Gather together a selection of objects - one **big** and one **little/small**, e.g. **big** cup, **little/small** cup, **big** pencil and **little/small** pencil.
- Explain that you are going to take it in turns to put the things away into a box/bag.
- Take out a pair of items e.g. two cups, one **big** and one **little/small**. Tell your child to find the **big** cup. and put it in the box.
 - Adult: 'What did you put in the box?'
 - Child: '**Big** cup'
 - Point to the remaining cup;
 - Adult: 'What shall I put in the box?'
 - Child: '**Little** cup.'

Easier activities

- During outdoor play, ask your child to jump into a **big/little** hoop. Then ask, 'Which hoop are you in?'
- There are numerous opportunities throughout the day for reinforcing big and little/small, e.g. laying the table (**big** spoon, **little** spoon), or reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

Advanced activities

- Increase the selection of **big/little** items so your child has to use a two-word phrase, **big/little/small** + object name. Use pictures as well as real objects.
- Say 'Bye-bye' or 'gone' as you hide the item;
 - 'Bye-bye big cup!'
 - '**Small** cup is gone!'
- Encourage the use of big or little/small items and where they're going;
 - Adult: 'Where is the **big** cup?'
 - Child: 'In (the) box.'
 - Adult: 'Yes, the **big** cup is in the box.'
- Extend the ideas into other play or daily routines, e.g. as you fill the **big** jug with water or use the little bucket to make a sandcastle.



Understanding many and few

Why is this important?

It is important that children are able to understand and describe amounts. These concepts can be tricky to learn e.g. a **few** leaves on a tree may relate to a hundred leaves, whereas a **few** biscuits left on a plate may only be three.

How you can help

The best way to help your child recognise and understand these concepts is to use the words **many** and **few** in everyday conversation. Your child will copy your use of these words and will become confident at using them in the correct context.

Easier activities.

- Hold a bag of sweets in your hand. Say, 'I have many sweets in this bag, would you like to take a **few**?'
- Collect together objects in the home and sort them into groups of **many** and **few**, e.g. 'Oh, there are **many** pegs in the basket.', or 'I see there are only a **few** biscuits in the tin.'
- Talk about **many** and **few** during everyday routines, e.g. 'There are **many** peas/beans on your plate, but only a **few** fish fingers.'

Advanced activities

Encourage your child to continue using these words in everyday conversations, thereby increasing their understanding and use of new vocabulary. Praise their use of new vocabulary.

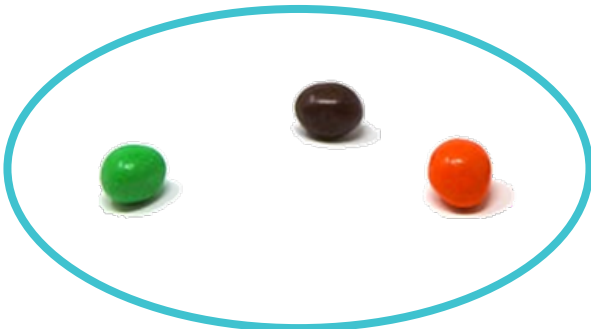


Image 1 Few Sweets

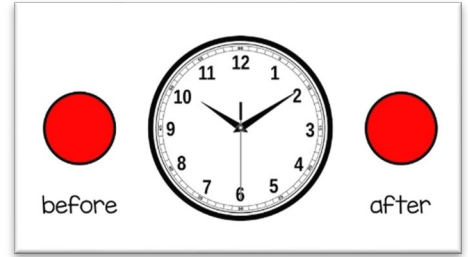


Image 2 Many Sweets

Learning the meaning of before and after

Why is this important?

It is important that children can understand and talk about concepts of time. **Before** and **after** are important concepts in a child's daily routine. The word **after** relates to something happening later than something else, e.g. 'Put your shoes on after your coat', or 'The number ten comes **after** the number nine.' This is a key concept when learning ordering and sequencing skills and also in relation to time, number and counting.



How you can help

- Ask your child to put the daily activities in order. Link two activities, e.g. 'You can ride your bike after you have eaten your dinner.'
- Ask what they have to do first. This requires your child to understand that the second part of the instruction (eating the dinner) has to be performed first.

Easier activity

Introduce the word **after** by putting it at the beginning of the sentence, e.g. '**After** going to the toilet, you should wash your hands'. This is easier as the sentences are in the same order as the tasks to be done.



Advanced activities

- Introduce the word **before** as a contrast
- Link your child's daily activities;

*'You can watch television **after** you have tidied away your toys.'*

*'We have to tidy away your toys **before** you can watch television.'*

Encourage your child to use the words **before** and **after** to describe simple sentences.