

Helping your Child Talk about Measures

At the beginning of school children will learn to simply compare one item against another in terms of weight, length, etc.

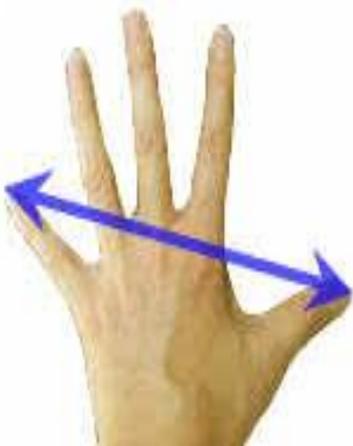


At home you're bound to do this naturally with them, for example when talking about taller friends or bigger pieces of food. To help reinforce this concept, you could give them five different items of different sizes and ask them to put them in order from smallest to largest. Equally, you could prepare them three bags with different amounts of dry rice in each. Get your child to feel each bag and decide which is heaviest, which is lightest and which is in the middle. Also you could compare the lengths of sticks or the weight or size of pebbles.

Encourage your child to use the correct vocabulary from as early an age as possible. The terms they'll use in the classroom include: **longer than, shorter than, heavier, lighter, taller, wider, etc.**

Next, children learn to use non-standard units to measure. Non-standard units are used by children in Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) and Year 1, to introduce very young children to the concept of measuring without them having to read any scales. Reading scales of any kind is a challenging skill in itself, so **the idea of non-standard measures is to focus the child on the concept of heavier, lighter, longer, shorter, etc.**

They may be asked to use balance scales to work out how many blocks weigh the same as the lump of plasticine. They may then be given another object, such as a pencil, and asked to work out how many blocks weigh the same as the pencil. If they use fewer blocks this time, they should be able to understand the concept of the plasticine weighing more than the pencil and be able to put this into a sentence verbally, for example: The plasticine is heavier than the pencil. OR The pencil is lighter than the plasticine.



Another example of using non-standard units would be to use hand span to **measure length**. For example: a child might be asked to measure the length of their table using their hand span. They would then record how many hand spans the table was and record this. Talk to them about minimising the variables (or, in child-speak, "making sure it's right") by using the same-sized object to measure with every time. You could illustrate this point by measuring the kitchen table in their hand-span and then yours - they'll quickly realise that the results are very different!

They might then be asked to measure the length of a book. They would need to express what they had learnt verbally with statements such as:

The book is shorter than the table. OR The table is longer than the book.



Children might also be asked to **measure capacity** in various containers by using small containers to measure amounts of liquid.

Containers of varying sizes.



A fixed unit of measure.



Let



= 1 unit.

A key life skill children learn within this maths topic is how to measure accurately, using **standard units**. Standard units are the units we usually use to measure the weight, length or capacity of objects. The standard (metric) units that would be discussed at primary school would include: grams and kilograms, centimetres, metres and kilometres, millilitres and litres.

When introducing standard units it's a good idea to mention some of the problems (noted above) of using non-standard measures to give meaning to the use of rulers, scales and measuring cups.



When measuring objects together, really encourage your child to take their time and become accurate. (Baking is an excellent way to illustrate this point; have them read the scales and explain that if you aren't accurate the result just won't taste or look right!)