

FACT SHEET

L-748

TEACH A CHILD ABOUT . . . SHAPES AND COLORS

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Young children live in a world of variety, a world of many different shapes and colors. But, it takes time and many learning experiences before the world really begins to take shape for the child. The ability to distinguish between different colors and shapes is not present at birth; it is a skill that develops as the infant matures.

Through firsthand experiences with people and objects, young children develop ideas and attitudes about the world around them. Children need things they can touch, see, taste, hear and smell to help them learn.

Play is to the child what work is to the adult. Through play, a child learns more about the world of shapes and colors. Learning to recognize different shapes, sizes and colors can be fun. It is also an indication that the child is maturing mentally.

Research studies show that young children first learn to recognize simple, basic shapes such as circles and squares. As they mature mentally, they can identify more complex shapes. It takes time and experience to learn to recognize different shapes without hesitation.

A child must be more mature mentally to know and name different colors than to recognize shapes. The first colors a child learns are bright, distinct colors such as red, green, yellow and blue. As the child grows older, he gradually learns that there are many different colors around him and that there are many shades and intensities of each color.

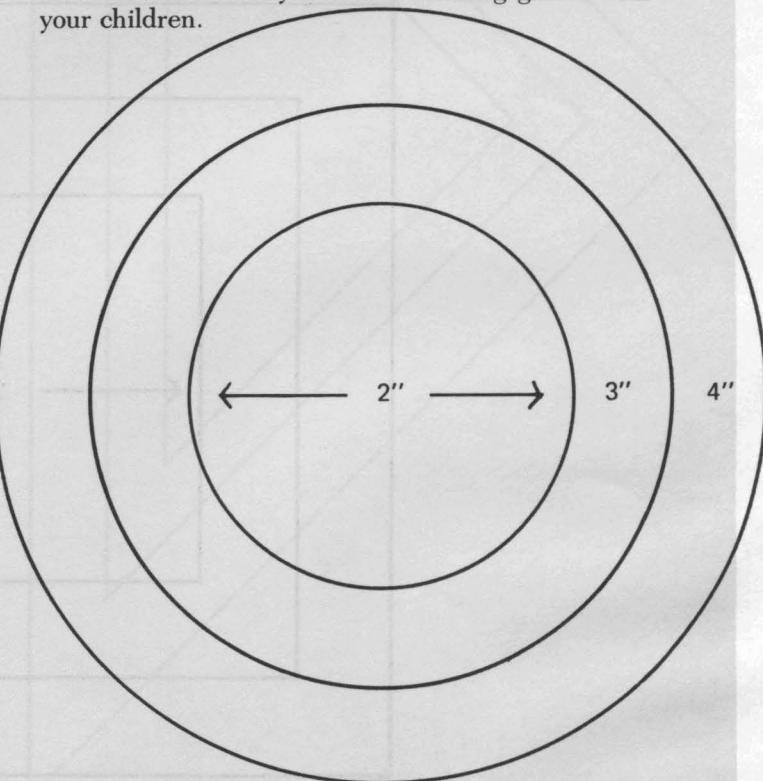
Learning how things are alike and different are basic skills children need to know when they start to school. Recognizing different shapes and objects is a skill children must develop before they learn to read and write. Parents can give their children a head start in developing these skills and building a rich

storehouse of ideas and knowledge by making learning fun and exciting.

Here are some activities you can enjoy with your children to help them learn more about shapes and colors.

Circles Teach Toddlers

Using these patterns, make circles of three different sizes — 2 inches, 3 inches and 4 inches in diameter. The circles must be big enough so the child cannot swallow them. Cut at least three circles of each size from red, yellow and blue cardboard. You can use these circles in many different learning games with your children.



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Toddlers are not ready to learn to recognize different shapes and colors, but these games will help them get ready to learn. Hand the child a circle and say, "Here is a red circle," or whatever color it is. He will probably hand it back to you. When he does, say "Thank you for the red circle." Always repeat the color and shape as you play with your child. This will help him learn to recognize different colors and shapes when he is older.

For another game, cut a slot long enough for the circles to go through in the top of a shoe or oatmeal box. Show the child how to make the circles disappear into the box. This game helps children to develop coordination as they drop the circles through the slot.

Circle Games for Preschoolers

The curious 3-year old is usually ready to start learning more about shapes and colors. With practice and your help, he will learn to recognize, match and identify a variety of shapes and colors. Here are some matching games for you and a preschool child to do.

Mix all of the circles of different sizes and colors together. Choose one colored circle and ask the child to pick all of the other similar circles out of the pile. Repeat this game with the other colors. Help the child place all of the red, blue and yellow circles in piles. Next, group the little red circles, the big red circles and the middle-sized circles. Repeat the matching game with the other colored circles.

Ask the child to put all of the little circles in a row; the middle-sized circles in a row; and the big circles in a row. Ask him to tell you which row is longest; shortest; middle-sized.

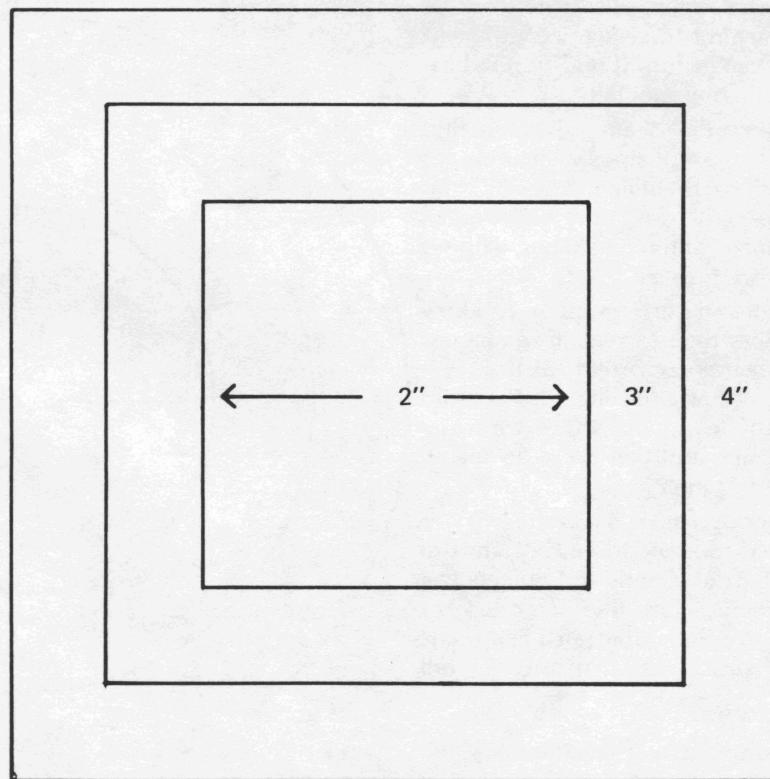
Talk with your child about how a circle looks. Circles are round and have no points or corners. See how many other circles you and the child can find in the room. Ask him if he sees a plate, a clock, an orange, a nickel, a cookie or a telephone dial that is round.

Look in magazines, outside in the yard or in the garage to find more circles. What was the largest circle the child found? What was the smallest? What different color circles did he see? Talking with a child about his experiences can be fun. Learning about things around him is an important part of every young child's life.

Square Games for Preschoolers

Using these patterns, make squares of three different sizes — 2 inches, 3 inches and 4 inches. Cut at least three of each size from red, blue and yellow cardboard. Help the child count the number of sides a square has. Then, measure the four sides of a square. Ask him if all of the sides of a square are always the same length? Now give the child a new challenge by using the different size squares for the matching game you tried earlier with the circles.

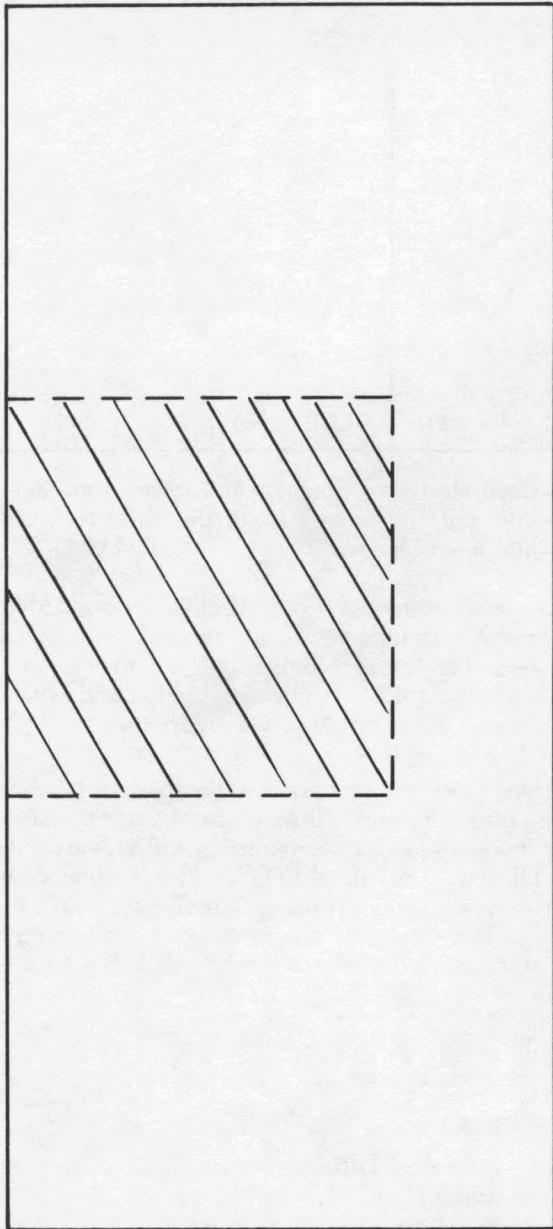
After you and the child have sorted and matched the different sizes and shapes of the squares, look for



other things in the house that are square in shape. Did he find a napkin, a box, a floor tile, a slice of bread or a picture that was square? What else did the child notice that was square? What were the largest and smallest squares you both found?

Fun with Puzzles

Playing with simple jigsaw puzzles helps young children to distinguish between different colors and shapes and improves eye-hand coordination. Choose or make simple puzzles such as this one-piece puzzle for the toddler. As the child matures, he will enjoy more complicated puzzles with more pieces.



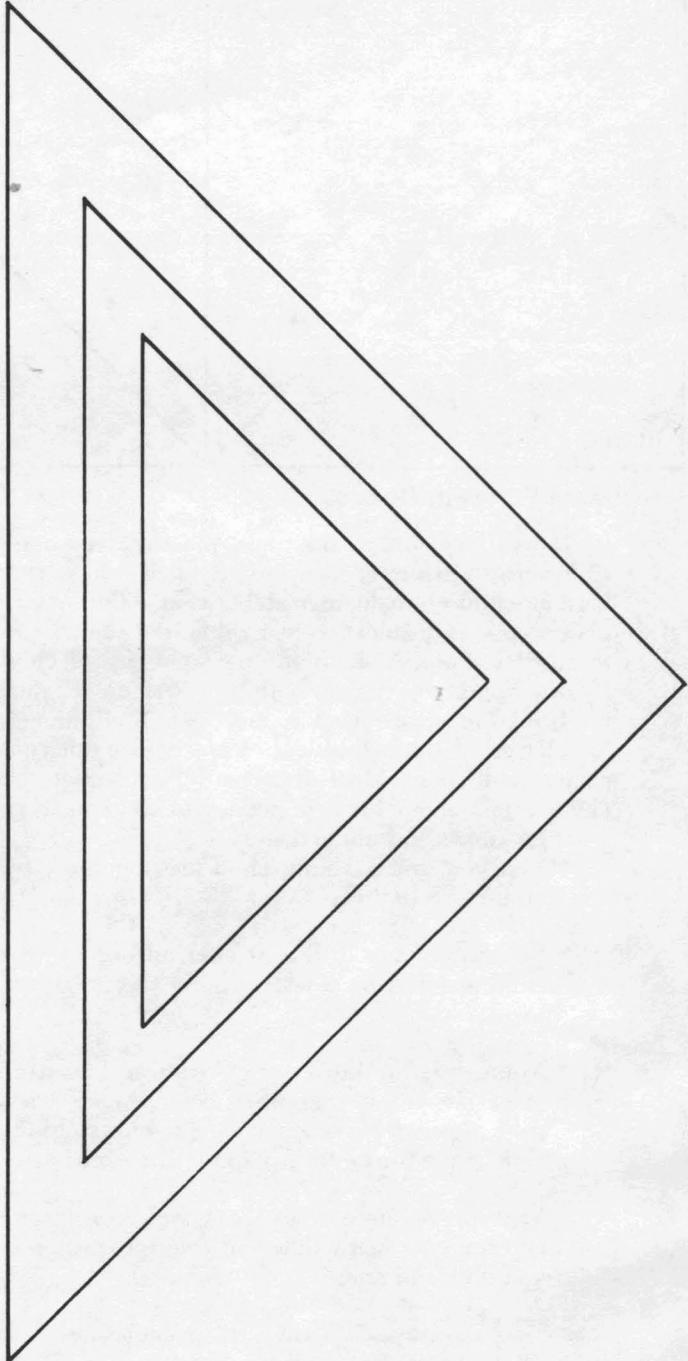
Triangle Games for Preschoolers

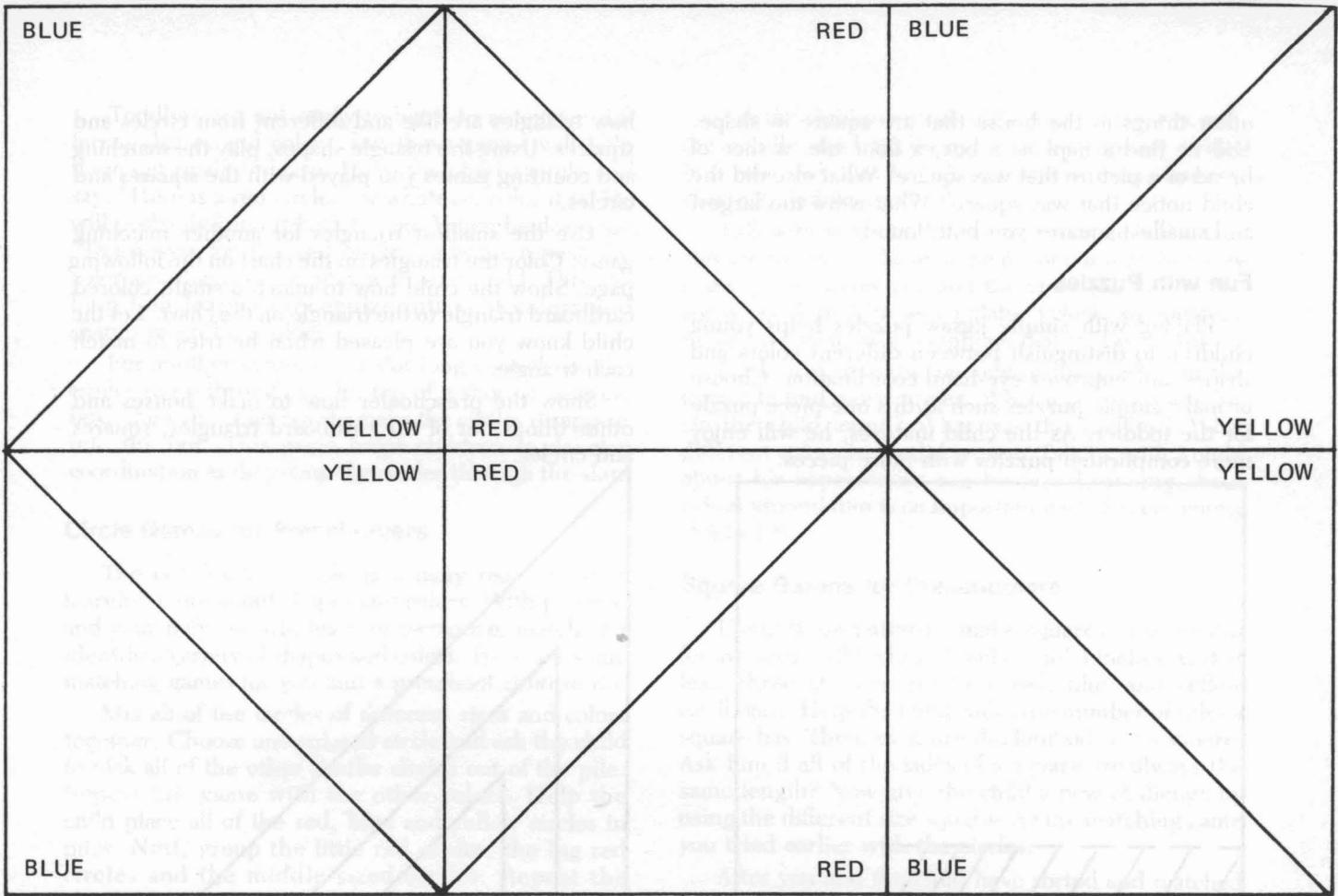
Cut at least four red, yellow and blue triangles the sizes of the pattern pieces. Talk with the child about

how triangles are like and different from circles and squares. Using the triangle shapes, play the matching and counting games you played with the squares and circles.

Use the smallest triangles for another matching game. Color the triangles on the chart on the following page. Show the child how to match a small, colored cardboard triangle to the triangle on the chart. Let the child know you are pleased when he tries to match each triangle.

Show the preschooler how to make houses and other things out of the cardboard triangles, squares and circles.





More Fun with Colors

It will take lots of time and practice for young children to learn to recognize individual colors. It is hard for children to distinguish between different colors because each color has many different shades and intensities. Color is all around us, so help your child by describing objects you both see. Statements such as "Bring the square block to me," or "Smell the yellow flower," help a child learn to recognize different shapes and colors. Most importantly, encourage the child to talk about his experiences so you can learn what he knows and understands.

When you and a young child are together, try some of these activities:

- See how many different colored objects the child can find on a walk around the neighborhood.
- Make a color book by cutting and pasting magazine pictures for each color. Make a red page, a green page, a black page, etc. Help the child name the items he included on each page.
- Visit the vegetable counter in the grocery store and see how many different colored vegetables you both can name.

- Read stories or poems about color. Talk about how different colors make the child feel. Ask him what his favorite color is and why?

There are many other objects children could identify by color and shape. Learning to describe what you see and are experiencing is one way to communicate with others. These games can help a child expand his thinking skills and share his experiences with you and other family members.

Parents are the first and most important teachers during the early years. Children need a rich variety of experiences to learn to recognize how things are alike and different. They need to talk with someone about what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. Through play and interaction with parents and other adults, a child's world will begin to take shape.

References

- PA-724 **Learning Different Shapes**, U.S. Department of Agriculture,
PA-713, **Fun with Circles**, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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