

family



JERRY CAMMARATA FATHERS DIARY

Prepare kids for world of metric

In a few years we're going to have to be using the metric system. It's not difficult to learn to think that way, and we ought to get started.

You can teach your children to think metrically as easily as you can teach them to use words.

When my two daughters were very young, friends of mine often were surprised to hear me use everyday adult language with them. I wouldn't have thought twice about telling them, "Come over here and let's have a conversation," for instance.

The word "conversation" might have been a little over their heads. But "come over here" wasn't, and after I had repeatedly sneaked the word "conversation" into enough contexts where they understood the rest of the words, they began to understand it and use it themselves. It didn't take long.

Today my children hear new words a lot and have become conditioned to start using them as soon as they learn them.

So 12-year-old Elizabeth is pretty quick. She was upset recently when I could not provide her with her weekly allowance when she wanted it, and she said so. "You'd think this house was an eleemosynary institution," she said.

If we want our children to have a variety of options in communicating their needs and thoughts, we have to be good role models, acting in such a way as to stimulate them to learn the necessary patterns.

So start finding ways to think metric. Find a few references. Talk about a liter of milk, for instance, and let the child know a liter is almost like a quart, only a little larger. Pour a liter of something; let the child lift it and get a feeling for what a liter is — for its volume, mass, weight.

Children will want to know where the system comes from. Here's a little summary you can give them.

In 1788, the American Congress set out to establish standard weights and measurements. The French Revolution had stimulated interest in such a prospect. Thomas Jefferson provided the first plan; his was similar to the modern metric system.

In 1799 France went metric. Then, by 1866, the American Congress, aware of the widespread and increasing application of the metric system in Europe, authorized the use of the system in the United States, and initiated it in various departments.

By 1960, the metric system was the official standard for all nations, though the United States and Great Britain used it only selectively.

Metric fun

Britain changed over first, going completely metric in 1965. And then, in 1975, the United States Congress passed a metric conversion bill that allowed 10 years' conversion time: everything is to be metric by 1985.

Flashcard bingo is a good way to teach the metric system to your preschoolers. Choose a metric symbol, show it to your child and pronounce its name; then let the child match it on a bingo-type board that has all the pertinent symbols on it.

Once you've all gotten familiar with the system with games like this, you can start using metric terms around the house.

Ask a child to get you a half-liter of mushrooms from the refrigerator, for instance.

The very young needn't know the system is based on the number 10. It's enough if they know there are acceptable standard ways to express certain measurements and values and if they can associate particular sizes, weights and volumes with particular metric terms.

You'll want to read Francis E. Masat and Charles H. Page's "Teaching the Metric System," too. Professional Educators Publishers of Lincoln, Nebraska published it in 1977, and it costs only \$2.25.

When the temperature reaches 40 degrees celsius next summer, ask your children to help you mix some refreshing Hawaiian punch. "Teaching the Metric System" has a nice recipe:

1430 mL vanilla ice cream
720 mL pineapple juice
75 mL orange juice
15 mL lemon juice
Beat ingredients. Serve in chilled glasses. Yields 3 liters.

Metric school for parents

How many of us have an idea of what a grams is? Or a kilometer, liter or hectare?

Major corporations today are cooperating by providing metric equivalents of the weights or volumes listed on their labels.

Pretty soon the metric system will be the only reference we have. You won't be able to lose a pound. You'll have to lose a kilogram.

And you'll have to do it by walking a country kilometer.

"Teaching the Metric System" also provides good learning games. A family can gather around the fireplace for some metric hangman or metric rummy, or can do a metric crossword puzzle or learn a nice metric rhyme.

*Here's one of those rhymes.
Let's have some appreciation
in these days of tribulation
for rules of metrication.
Length is measured by meter
and volume is measured by liter.
Hams, lamps, and yams
can all be weighed in grams.
Choose a book that has a map.
Place the book upon your lap.
Consider distance, oh gentle
readers,*

and convert the miles to kilometers.

*Nation after nation has made
the swing to metric.*

*Isn't it time we took the plunge
and made measurement less
hectic?*

— Masat and Page