

Things We Need: Economics for Preschoolers



Preschoolers begin to learn basic economic principles when they use concepts such as needs and resources in their investigations, play, and discussions. Here are some teacher-tested ways of introducing economic concepts to preschoolers.

Introduce economic concepts through play.

- Teach children games that call for set quantities of items. Examples include *Go Fish* and *Connect 4*.
- Explain the game rules using words such as “need” and “enough.” “You need four cards of the same color; three aren’t enough.”
- Play *Musical Chairs*, which uses principles of supply and demand.

Talk with children about needs and resources.

- Show that a *need* is something that people, animals, or plants must have to survive or that people require to finish a task. For example, you could ask, “What do you think these plants need in order to grow?” “How much blue paint do you think we’ll need to cover this whole sheet of paper?” “How many cartons of milk should we get from the cafeteria so everyone has one at lunchtime today?”
- Explain that *resources* are things that are used to meet needs. Ask questions to find out what the children know about resources needed to survive (air, water, food, shelter). “Remember what happened to our flowers after six weeks of no rain?” “One of our classroom jobs is to help take care of our class pet. What are the different things we need to do for our bunny each day?”
- Help children investigate questions such as “What are some ways that animals or plants get things they need?” “Where does our food come from? How do we get the water that we drink?” Arrange for them to interview doctors, veterinarians, or gardeners about the survival needs of people, animals, and plants.
- Help the children make a chart of the foods that various animals need to be healthy. Start with classroom pets and other familiar animals. Children can get information from nonfiction books and magazines or from animal care experts.
- Invite children to talk about things that they need to survive. Ask the children to make a list of things they need and where to find them in their home, school, and community. “We need water, and we can get that from the water fountain or sink.” “We need food, and we can get that from our kitchen, cafeteria, garden, or a food pantry.”

Help the children put economic ideas to use.

- Ask children to think about what they need to finish tasks. “How much tape do you think you need for your project?” “What other resource could you use if you run out of tape?”
- Invite children to notice that amounts of resources can affect plants and animals around them. “What do you predict will happen if this plant gets just one drop of water every day?” “Isaac says that birds will come here if we put out seeds for them. What do you think about that, Ava?”

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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