

A Note About the Use of Manipulatives

Making Manipulatives Accessible

Have a variety of manipulatives available to students. Manipulatives are tools for cognitive processing. Students should know that they can get a tool (manipulative) to use whenever they need it.

Appropriate Use

Discuss appropriate use of manipulatives and repeat, as needed, during the year:

- Keep items on the table/desk.
- Share with partners.
- Ask permission before “helping” another student.
- Put all items back in the right containers.

Create basic rules for specific items (e.g., show students how to roll number cubes between both hands and drop them about one inch above the table so they won’t roll onto the floor. If a student’s number cube does roll off, he/she loses the turn).

Free Exploration

Students need to have opportunities to freely explore each new type of manipulative before they can use that manipulative effectively in a mathematics lesson.

Organizing Manipulatives

Some kindergarten teachers create small individual kits with a variety of manipulatives. Others use small baskets or containers for each type of manipulative that might be used in a lesson. They fill the baskets before class. If students are working in groups, one student from each group can be assigned to pick up the manipulatives for his/her group. Show students how to clean up (e.g., hold container under the table and scoop the materials into the container).

Minimizing Sound

Use soft placemats for each student. Any soft material will work. Placemats also clearly define a student workspace.