

Menu Math

Got a stack of take-out menus sitting in a drawer in your kitchen? Pull them out for this game of "restaurant." While talking about sweet and savory foods, you and your second grader can reinforce real-world applications of counting and using money. You'll also be building success in school: in second grade and beyond, money is a very common math topic.

What You Need:

- Old, extra take-out menus
- Bills and coins
- Silverware tray (to be used as a cash register tray to keep money sorted)
- White out
- Paper
- Pencils



What You Do:

1. Take out some old take-out menus for food choices your child enjoys. Prices are listed, of course, in decimal form, which kids won't study in detail until third, fourth, and fifth grades. Use your white-out to cover the decimals and just show the dollar amounts on each item.
2. Now tell your child that you will take turns "playing restaurant", switching off roles of being the customer and the server. You and your child may wish to decide upon different names for yourselves during the role play.
3. You should start out in the role of server, so you can model the procedure first for your child.
4. Make sure your child has ample money to pay for items on the menu. Maybe she should even make a trip to the "bank" before going out on the town. When the "customer" arrives, she should be seated at the table and you should take down her order on a notepad.
5. Total the items on the notepad for your child to see, state the price, and give your child the check. Make change if necessary (no tip required!).
6. You can repeat this game as many times as you want, switching roles each time. Use a different menu to keep things fresh, or have your child create her own menu.
7. When you've played a few rounds, your child is ready to graduate to another important, family-centered activity. Tell him that you'd like to arrange takeout for your family, but you need his help. Have him make an "order list" by copying down dish names and dollar amounts, and then calculating dollars for you. This is a real-life, Big Kid skill, and you can expect a very proud second grader when you're done. Bon appétit!

While this activity provides great math practice, it's also a good hands-on social studies lesson. When they play this game with you, kids are learning how shops work, and they are preparing to do the same steps they've watched you master any time they go to a store. Not bad learning for an hour-long game!