

### Let's Sort It Out!

Sorting is important work. In addition to being a fun and satisfying activity, sorting is a key foundational math skill for preschoolers. It's important to give children the opportunity to sort, classify and order objects by size, shape, color and a variety of other attributes. The more they practice, the more they engage in analytical thinking and the better prepared they will be for kindergarten.

### Materials:

- Toy food or pictures of food clipped from magazines and flyers (ideally laminated)
- 10 Bowls
- 2 Baskets
- Assorted tongs (if using toy food)
- Labels for the 5 food groups with a picture to represent each (Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Protein and Dairy)
- Labels for the 5 fruit/veg colors with a colored tag for each (Red, Orange/Yellow, Green, Blue/Purple, White)
- Printouts of the [MyPlate template](#)

### Set---up:

For this activity, set up two sorting stations and label them:

- 5 Food Groups
- 5 Colors

For the "5 Food Groups" station, set up a row of 5 bowls with 5 labels. Place a basket behind the bowls and fill it with play food or food pictures of all 5 food groups. Ideally you will have enough to put 2 or 3 food items in each of the 5 bowls.

For the "5 Colors" station, set up a row of 5 bowls with 5 labels. Place a basket behind the bowls and fill it with play food or food pictures of just 2 of the food groups—Fruits and Vegetables. Ideally you will have enough to put 2 or 3 food items in each of the 5 bowls.

Note: If you use toy food pieces, you may add tongs to the activity and have kids use them to pick up and place the items in the bowls. This adds a fun dimension and also helps to exercise pincer muscles and develop fine-motor skills.

### Instructions:

#### 5 Food Groups Station

Demonstrate how to sort and classify the foods at this station, talking through each step of the way. For instance:

- “I’m going to reach inside the basket and pick a piece of food. Look: here’s a fish. Where does that belong? In the Protein basket. Lean protein like fish, chicken and beans give us energy and help us grow strong.”
- “Here’s some broccoli. That goes in the Vegetable basket. Vegetables are one of the 5 food groups. It’s good for our bodies to eat vegetables every day.”

### 5 Colors Station

Demonstrate how to sort and classify the fruits and vegetables, explaining as you go. For instance:

- “Fruits and vegetables come in a range of colors—just like a rainbow! It’s good to eat a rainbow of colors every day.”
- “Look: here’s a kiwifruit. I’m going to put it in the Green basket. Here’s a pumpkin. I’m going to put it in Yellow and Orange basket.”

Then have kids do the exercise themselves. Keep the stations set up and accessible so kids can play with them freely when they have time.

### **Extensions:**

“Perfect Portions” — Sort food from the 5 Food Groups basket into recommended meal portions, using ChooseMyPlate.gov templates. Make a “perfect plate” yourself as an example, stressing the recommendation that fruits and vegetables make up half your plate.

“Fruits vs. Veggies”— Have kids choose one fruit and one vegetable of each color and place them in each bowl. Demonstrate how it’s done, e.g.

- “Find a fruit that’s red. (apple) Find a vegetable that’s red. (beets)”
- “Find a fruit that’s green (kiwi). Find a vegetable that’s green (broccoli).”