7

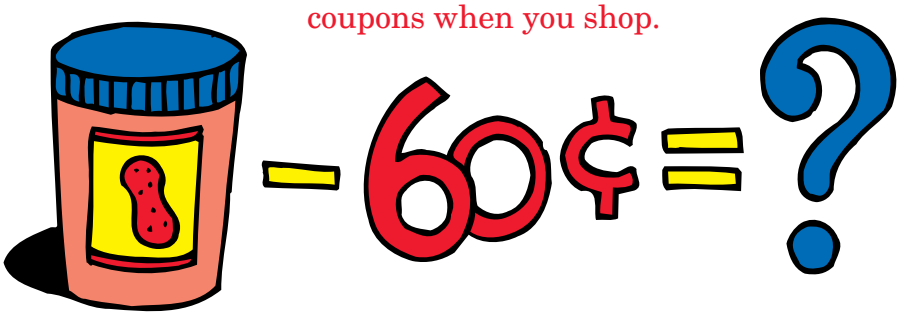
How much do we save?

Materials

- Grocery advertisements with coupons
- Scissors
- Pencil and paper (optional)

"Look—here's a coupon for $1.00 off on juice bars, and here's one for 60¢ off my favorite brand of chunky peanut butter! There's a bunch of others we can use, too. I wonder how much we'll save."

Everyone wants to save money! With coupons, children can learn about math and about saving. In this activity, as children figure out coupon savings, they practice adding, multiplying, and estimating with dollars and cents. You can do this activity even if you don't use coupons when you shop.



Before you begin

Alone or with your child, go through grocery advertisements and cut out about 20 coupons. If you use coupons, pick ones you think you'll use on your next trip to the store.

1. Talk about grocery coupons and store savings

If your children are unfamiliar with coupons, explain how people use them. Point out the important information on several coupons—the product, how many you have to buy, the amount of savings, and when the offer expires.

Ask your children to make a quick prediction about how much your family generally spends on groceries each week, and how much you could save with coupons. Some children will have no idea of these amounts. As you repeat this activity, they'll develop a better understanding.

2. Find out the savings

Ask your children to find the total value of all the coupons in the set.

If they need help getting started, ask them to begin by sorting coupons worth the same amount into separate piles—a pile of 25¢ coupons, a pile of 50¢ coupons, and so on. Here are some other things you can suggest:

Combine coupons to make dollars. Suggest finding and grouping coupons that add up to $1.00, such as 40¢ + 60¢, or 25¢ + 25¢ + 50¢. Your children can also make groups that total $2.00, other whole-dollar amounts, or amounts like 50¢ that are easy to work with.

Count up to add coupons worth the same amount. For example, your children could count a group of 25¢ coupons this way: 25¢, 50¢, 75¢…. If your children need help after the first few coupons, you can count along.

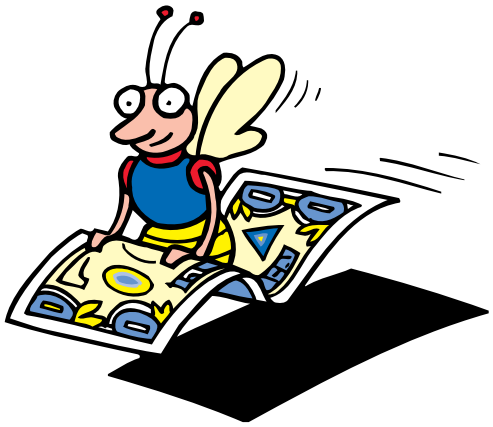
Keep track of the coupons already added and those still left to add. Your children can make a special place to set aside coupons after figuring them into the total.

If your children need help finding the total of all the coupons, talk through how you would do it yourself.

3. Explain solutions

Listen to your children as they explain how they added the coupon amounts. Encourage them to check the total by adding the coupons in a different way—for example, by regrouping them into different "dollar" combinations, or adding them up in a different order.

Age range 7–11 (for ages 5–7, see Variations)



When you repeat this activity

Try this with coupons for the pharmacy or hardware store, or with coupons your children choose for their own "pretend" grocery shopping lists. If you use coupons, you can make this activity a regular part of your grocery shopping routine.

For more challenge, if your market doubles or triples the value of any coupons, explain how this works. Children can find the total value of the coupons with this information in mind.

Variations

Use a calculator (ages 7–11)

After your children do this activity with a calculator, ask them to check their results with a mental estimate. For example, they can round coupon values to the nearest 25¢ (round 45¢ to 50¢ or 99¢ to $1.00) and then figure the approximate total. Ask children to talk about times when it makes sense to use a calculator and times when it's just as easy or easier to find the total using common sense.

Do we have enough to save $5.00? (ages 5–7)

Provide about 10 coupons worth different amounts. Choose coupons worth 25¢, 50¢, or whole-dollar amounts. This is the challenge: Find out if there are enough coupons to save your family at least $5.00. (If you have a lot of coupons worth whole-dollar amounts, choose a larger total.) Ask your children to explain how they found the answer.

How can you sort the coupons? (ages 5–7)

This activity can help children work on sorting, logical thinking, and numbers. Provide 20 or more coupons for your children to sort into groups. They can decide what the groups will be. They might form categories like junk food, healthy food, things you can eat, things only pets can eat, or things you use to clean with. When they have finished sorting, ask number questions about their coupon groups:

"Which group has the most coupons? Which group has the fewest? Which coupon lets us save the most? The least?"