

Number Skills

Help your child to prepare for learning maths at school with these simple games, rhymes and everyday activities. Find fun ways of exploring maths at home, and then see how the fun continues as your child starts school.



CRACKING COUNTING

- Get into the habit of counting everything with your child, from ducks on the pond to stairs up to bed. You can count anything, such as how many lampposts are on the street, how many houses have a red door, how many pieces of fruit are in the bowl etc
- Encourage reliable one-to-one counting by showing your child how to point to each item as they count, or to move the items as they count so they do not count each item more than once.
- Counting songs and rhymes teach children numbers and order, as well as rhythm. 'One, two, buckle my shoe', 'Five little ducks', 'Ten in the bed...'
- Play counting - based games such as dominoes, ludo, snakes and ladders or number snap.



KNOWING NUMBERS

- Play 'spot the number' or a 'number hunt' - focus on the numeral 0-5 to begin with, and challenge your child to find them everywhere - on clocks, front doors, car registrations, birthday cards etc.
- Number hunt in jelly - spread out some plastic numbers in jelly when it's all set get them to search for the numbers in the jelly.

SHAPE, SIZE AND QUANTITY

- **Go on a 'shape hunt'** - to see how many circles, squares, rectangles and triangles your child can find. (Square windows, circular plates, and rectangular posters).
- Talk about the shape and size of objects e.g. big car, little car, round ball, square table, rectangular book.
- **Shape sorting game** - get your child to organize a handful of objects according to a similar shape. Shapes can include different materials, from card cut-outs to buttons. Start with basic shapes like triangles, circles, squares, and rectangles and try to keep all shapes uniform. Gradually incorporate unique shapes like the heart, star, and oval.
- **Size Sorting Games** - This game is played in various ways, with each skill focusing on size instead of other variables. Start by asking the children to sort blocks of different sizes according to size. From there, ask toddlers to arrange the blocks from smallest to largest. Switch the items to different items, depending on what you have available in the home.



Making Patterns - Encourage your child to find patterns around them, on their clothes etc. Support you child to make their own patterns using items like beads, buttons, lego blocks, farm animals, shapes e.g. beads - red bead, yellow bead, red bead, yellow bead - firstly ask your child to copy your pattern, then to finish/continue your pattern. Asking "what colour bead comes after the yellow bead?" Once your child has grasped a 2 colour pattern, introduce a third colour etc.

Colour Sorting - Although many think of mathematics as numbers, colour variations are also a critical component of maths (they handle similarities and grouping). Have your child hunt through the home, garden to find something that matches the colour shown.

Cooking - Cooking activities are a favourite for most children and learning to cook is an important life skill. Alongside this, there is plenty of opportunity for mathematical thinking, activity and language. Children can choose a simple recipe to follow and be encouraged to collect the correct ingredients and weigh them out accurately. There is plenty of opportunity for counting; ingredients, spoonful's and products, and for using mathematical language to describe weight, size and quantity. Using scales, measuring jugs, cups and spoons to measure ingredients accurately is a great learning opportunity too.

On a walk - when taking a walk, ask young children to look out for and keep count of how many birds or cars they spot.

Setting the table - Counting can easily be incorporated into setting the table by counting plates, forks, spoons, bowls, and so forth. Chairs and place mats can also be counted. The key is to be sure to show the numbers with your hands as you count, asking the child to also show you how many.

Laundry Sorting - As well as helping to get a household chore done, allowing small children to help with sorting laundry can also be beneficial to their early maths development. They can categorize clothing by type, colour or who it belongs to. They can also help to pair up socks - helps them focus on size, length, colour or pattern, and build up an understanding of the term 'pair' (even better if there are a few odd socks in the mix!).

Playing sports – With young children, try passing a ball in the garden and counting how many times you can pass it before it is dropped. (This can work just as well inside with some balled up socks. Can you beat your score?)

Story time! - Bring maths into story time. Practise using position words when looking at picture books, asking questions like "What is behind the boy?" and "What can you see under the table?". This can help young children to think about space, shapes and positioning. You could also try counting and looking for numbers in your child's favourite story book e.g. "How many biscuits can we see?" or "How many times did the dog woof?"

Number songs



The animals went in two by two.



1, 2, 3, 4, 5, once I caught a fish alive.



Five little ducks went swimming one day.



One finger, one thumb, keep moving.



Five little monkeys jumping on the bed.



Ten fat sausages sizzling in a pan.



Five little speckled frogs.



Ten in the bed.