



HELPING
YOUR CHILDREN
LEARN AND ENJOY
MATHEMATICS

GIVING YOUR CHILD A GOOD START IN MATH

Young children begin learning math before they take their first step into a kindergarten classroom. When toddlers hold up three fingers and ask for “this many cookies,” they are already doing math and ready to learn more.

As a parent, it may be tempting to think you don’t need to worry about helping your child learn mathematics until elementary school, but the seeds of many important math concepts are planted when children are very young. In fact, early experiences can determine how your child looks at mathematics for the rest of his or her life. It’s never too early to start learning—and liking math!

Children between the ages of two and four generally experience mathematics through simple counting. Counting is a basic and very important concept that helps children bring order to the world around them. Early counting and “how many” experiences introduce children to math concepts that become deeper and more complex in elementary school. For example, counting three dimes becomes a way of understanding 30 cents.

The more opportunities young children have to count, the better they understand the meaning and use of numbers—and the more confidence they’ll have with mathematics later on. By reading your children counting books, singing counting songs, and playing counting games, you’re having fun with numbers and giving them a foundation for success in math.

TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG COUNTERS:

- Count frequently. Find things to count every day, everywhere, and in every way. Start slowly with just a few things. As your child’s ability to count grows, find bigger and bigger collections of different things to count.
- Count real objects: cookies, coins, toys, etc. Children discover that counting is more than a sing-song repetition when they count real objects. Encourage



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THE COUNTING GAME: A FUN ANYTIME MATH ACTIVITY

your child to say one number as he or she touches each object.

Arrange objects in different ways for counting—for example, in piles, rows, and circles.

- Reinforce your child’s counting. When your child finishes counting, you could say, “One, two, three cookies. You counted three cookies!” To correct a mistake, gently count again along with your child, holding a finger and touching each cookie as you say the number.
- Sometimes children forget which objects they’ve counted. If this happens, have your child move each object into a “counted” pile as he or she counts. If your child gets frustrated or continues repeating the same mistake, be patient. For the moment, you could simply stop counting and try it again another day.
- Don’t worry if your child uses his or her fingers for counting. Fingers are the best mathematical tools children have! They’re always handy and ready to use. You can also encourage your child to use other objects to keep track of their count: one bean for every letter in their name or one popsicle stick for each door in your home.
- Once your child has mastered basic counting, start practicing how to count by twos, fives, and even tens. This will give your child a great start for learning math in school.

The Counting Game is so simple it can be played by young children, yet so mathematically intriguing it can challenge older children as well. It’s a perfect “anywhere, anytime” game. Anyone who can count to 20 can play it. Here’s how it goes:

1. Two people take turns counting aloud. The first person starts at ONE and the game is over when the counting reaches TWENTY.
2. Each player counts aloud by saying one, two, or three more numbers *in order* from where the other player stopped counting.
3. Whoever says the number TWENTY, by itself or in a group of numbers, is the winner.

For example:

<i>Player One</i>	<i>Player Two</i>
1, 2, 3	4
5, 6	7, 8
9, 10, 11	12
13, 14	15, 16
17	18, 19, 20!

At first glance, the game seems like a simple way for young counters to practice—but there’s actually more to it than that. If you play this game with an older child, you’ll both start to see number patterns and discover that there’s a strategy for winning. (Hint: it has to do with the multiples of 4.)

You can play four or five rounds of the Counting Game quickly—so play it often to give your child a chance to figure out the winning strategy. Later on, try modifying the rules of the game by having a different winning number, such as TWENTY-ONE, and see what happens.