

Helping your child with – Counting

One of the first experiences children have with numbers is “counting”. Counting starts as learning a pattern of words, just like a nursery rhyme. As children’s counting develops, they begin to relate the words to a quantity or number of things.

How do children learn to count and use numbers?

Children learn the pattern of counting words by repetition. Initially, this pattern may have gaps where the child leaves out a number in the sequence, or the child may invent numbers. It is common to hear a child say twenty-ten after counting to twenty-nine.

However, remembering the words for each number in the correct order is only part of the process of counting. To “count” children need to match saying the number words with the correct number of “things”. Children should be given lots of opportunities to practise and explore counting groups as well as making groups. Children also need to recognise and name numbers.

What can you do at home?

- Count with your child the number of buttons as you do up a cardigan or shirt.
- Encourage your child to count the number of pegs used to hang out the washing.
- Count the number of steps from the front door to the letterbox.
- Count the number of eggs in a carton, and again after some have been removed.
- Count the number of times you and your child can throw a ball to each other without dropping it.
- Read and talk about stories and rhymes that use numbers.
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes that include numbers such as Five Little Ducks and Baa Baa Black Sheep.
- Have your child count as far as he or she is able to and then encourage your child to join you while you continue counting.
- Ask your child to start counting from a number other than one. This will help them when they need to add two groups together and can start counting from the larger group.
- Ask your child to tell you the number before or after a number. How old will you be next year? How old were you last year?
- Ask your child to give you enough plates, cups or cutlery for each person when setting the table.

- Play games such as Dominoes, Snakes and ladders, card games or board games involving a die with dot patterns. This will help your child to recognise patterns and count. Change the die to one showing numbers to help your child read and recognise numbers.
- Collect and sort shells. Count how many are in each group.
- Look at and say the numbers on license plates and road signs.
- Ask your child to help you count the pieces as you cut up food such as pie, quiche, fruit or sandwiches.
- Make farmyards from empty cartons. Count with your child the number of toy animals as he or she places them in each yard. Ask questions such as: Which yard has the most animals? After placing some animals in a yard, stop and then count on as you add more.
- Help your child to remember your phone number and to press the correct buttons on the phone.

