



8 months *to* 18 months

NUMBER SENSE

How are children learning about numbers?

Introduction

What are young toddlers learning about numbers?

Young children begin to practice the skills needed for arithmetic and math long before they enter elementary school. Most of these skills are developed through their self-initiated play with materials and through simple interactions with adults.

- Young children are introduced to counting skills through everyday interactions such as parents offering them “three pieces of banana—1-2-3,” or suggesting that “we read these two books.”
- Children between 8 and 18 months develop more ideas about the number of things. When your baby wants you to give her more bread, she will reach for it, say “mo,” or use sign language to communicate that she wants more.
- If you offer her more food when she is full, she might shake her head “no.” When she is done eating she might say or sign “all done.” This shows that she is beginning to understand the concepts of “enough” and “more.”
- Young toddlers are experimenting with small numbers of things. They know that they can usually only carry one thing in each hand, so they have a lot of practice understanding the number “two,” even before they can say “two.”
- When playing with sand, she might put a little sand in one container and a lot of sand in another and describe the one with more sand as “bigger,” showing that she is beginning to think about size and comparison.
- She might line up two or three cars in a row.



Tips for families to help children in understanding numbers:

Many of the things that families do naturally with children help them to develop their math and number skills. There are many opportunities in our everyday lives where adults are counting things and children are practicing numbers in their play. Here are some suggestions of things families can do:

- You can ask your toddler to put his shoes away. “Here is one shoe and here is the other one—two shoes. Can you carry them to the closet? Now you have two shoes.” There are many opportunities like this where you can use simple numbers as you talk to your young toddler
- You can point to your nose and ask your toddler to show you his nose. “Here is my nose and here is your nose.” This begins to introduce the concept of one-to-one correspondence. “One person/one nose. Each person has a nose.”
- When you point to ears, eyes and feet, you can count them. “I have two eyes—one, two—and you have two eyes—one, two!” Young toddlers also begin to enjoy counting fingers and toes. Young children are fascinated with their bodies. Counting fingers, toes or hands gives them a chance to learn about numbers.

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- When we offer children food, we naturally talk about quantity. “You ate all of your chicken. Are you full or do you want more chicken?”
- When he tucks a baby doll under each arm, you can say, “You have two babies.”
- When your toddler points to the airplane in the sky, you can explain, “Wow, you noticed the airplane. It is high in the sky. Now we can’t hear it anymore. It is gone.”
- There are many chances to talk about the relationship of things (high, low, far, close) as well as the size of things in your baby’s environment.

Everyday interactions that focus on children's interests help them learn new information.

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