

Progression of Counting Skills



Below you will find information about how children's counting skills will typically develop in the Early Years. Counting is a fundamental maths skill for children to learn and master. In order to develop confidence with counting, children benefit from being exposed to a range of counting opportunities which allow them to rehearse these skills in a variety of ways. Before your child can begin to count objects, pictures, sounds or movements, they need to be increasingly confident with counting by rote. This means that they can say the number names in order and then from here, they can begin to develop an understanding of what each number actually means. From a very early age children will begin to learn counting through rote by songs, nursery rhymes and games.

During their time in the Early Years, children typically develop a secure understanding of numbers to 20 and a growing awareness of larger numbers. Children will progress through the counting skills set out below at different rates. We encourage children to begin developing their counting skills by initially working with smaller quantities up to 5. This would then progress to amounts up to 10 and then eventually they will begin handling quantities of up to 20.

Count up to 20 items in a set which can be moved.

*Encourage the child to move objects into a new group as they count them so that they can keep track of which ones have been counted.
How many objects are there?
Are they counting each object only once?
Do they say the next number in the sequence as they are touching the next object? We call this one-to-one correspondence.
Do they know the last number in the set is the total/quantity?*

Count the same set of objects again with the items in a different order/array.

*Move the same set of objects into a different array whilst the child is observing.
Do they notice that the amount is the same even though the items have been moved? This is called the conservation of number.*

Count up to 20 items in a row which can be touched but not moved.

*Line up the objects in front of the child. Allow them to touch each one but not move them.
Do they say the next number in the sequence as they are touching the next object? We call this one-to-one correspondence.*

Count a different quantity of objects lined up but ask the child to start counting from the 3rd object in the row.

*Again, allow them to touch each object but not move them.
Do they remember to count all of the objects within the set of stop at the end of the row? This will mean they have to go back to the beginning of the row and continue counting the objects that were missed out when they started counting.*

Count up to 20 items in a set which can be touched but not moved. Ensure the items are arranged in a random formation.

Can the child keep track of which items have been counted and ensure they count each object only once?

Count up to 20 items in a row which can be seen but not touched.

Children will generally use their eyes to track the objects in the row as they are counting to ensure they count them all.

Count up to 20 items in a random arrangement which can be seen but not touched.

The child will now need to keep careful track of the objects which have already been counted.

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Count up to 20 sounds.

Allow the child to watch and listen to the sounds first and then progress to listening only. This could be marbles being dropped into a jar or bangs on a drum. Vary the speed of the sounds so that they do not necessarily coincide with the usual rhythm of counting.

Count up to 20 physical movements.

Ensure the physical movements are created by another object or person and not by the child. For example ask the child to count how many jumps you make. It is a much more challenging skill to ask a child to count themselves making 11 jumps. This would come later. Similarly to counting sounds, ensure that the movements happen at varying speeds to challenge their counting.

Count out up to 20 objects from a set.

This skill involves children being given a large set of objects and asked to count a set quantity of items out from the larger set. For example, counting 8 sweets out from a whole bag of sweets. Here they must remember to keep careful track of their counting and know that when they reach the given number they stop counting out objects.