



Birth *to* 8 months

NUMBER SENSE

How are children learning about numbers?

Introduction

What are babies 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 infants are developing early ideas about numbers, even before they can talk. They begin by focusing on one thing at a time. They will reach for a toy you hold out to them. In a room full of people an infant will watch just her dad as he walks toward her.
- Infants are introduced to counting skills through everyday interactions, such as parents counting their fingers and toes, or getting two kisses, one on each cheek.
- As babies approach 8 months of age, when they hold two toys in each hand and you offer a third toy, they may drop one of the toys they are holding so that they can hold onto the new object. This shows a beginning understanding of what “two” is.



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:

- When you hold up one finger for your baby to grab, you can say, “You are holding my finger.” When you hold up two fingers for him to grab, you can say, “Here are two fingers.” There are many opportunities like this where you can use simple numbers as you talk to your baby. Infants learn through their hands-on experiences. When they grab your finger, they begin to build an idea of number.

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- You can point to your nose and then point to your baby’s 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 we nurse or feed babies, we naturally talk about quantity. “You stopped sucking. Are you full or do you want more milk?”
- When he crawls over to pick up a ball in one hand and then picks up a ball in the other hand, you can say, “You found a ball! Now you have two balls, one in each hand!”

When we offer children new words and ideas about things they are interested in, they are especially attentive.

- When the garbage truck drives up and your baby points, you might explain, “You see the garbage truck. It is a big truck.” There are many chances to talk about the size of things in your baby’s environment. When we offer children new words and ideas about things they are interested in, they are especially attentive.

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