

Counting the Family

Targeted skill

Young children are expected to count objects and associate that number with the objects it represents.

Materials

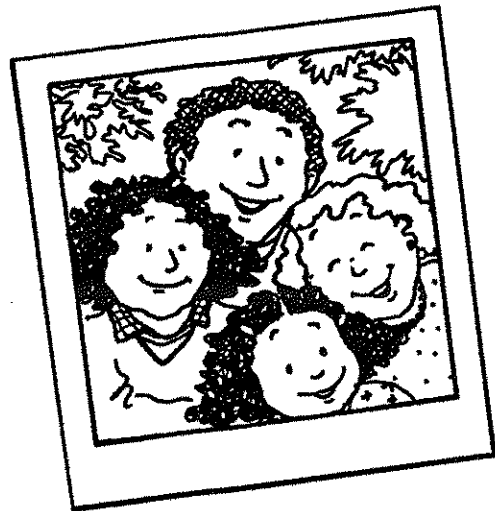
- ◆ paper
- ◆ pen, pencil, crayon, felt-tip marker, or other writing tool
- ◆ family's personal items, such as clothing

What to do

This activity is not so much a game as a way of making counting a part of everyday life at home. Young children need lots of opportunities to simply count things. Introduce the idea of “taking inventory,” as clerks do in stores. Ask your child to help you take inventory of the family's clothing. Count everyone's socks one day, shoes the next. Count T-shirts, underwear, jeans, shirts, and so on. This gives children a reason to count things. When young children feel they are doing something to help the family, they take the idea more seriously.

For example, if you and your child are taking inventory of the family's socks, you might begin in your child's room, with the sock drawer. Place all of the socks on the bed. Help your child count the pairs (or you can count individual socks if you wish) as he or she returns them to the drawer. You might also have your child simply move the pairs from one area on the bed to another area as he or she counts. After that, the socks can be returned to the drawer. Then move on to another family member's sock drawer.

As you count things together, record them and talk about larger and smaller numbers. Comparing quantities is another important mathematical skill and is best practiced in the context of doing something the child believes is important.



Counting

Counting the Family (continued)

Extending the activity

After your child has had multiple opportunities to count things and record them, expand the idea of taking inventory to other things in the house. You can count the number of doors and windows, the number of cans and boxes of food, the number of pots and pans. Or go into your child's room and work with him or her to take inventory of things you find there. Remember to let your child do the actual counting and recording of the numbers of things.

What your child is practicing

As your child counts things, he or she is developing number sense. Just because your child can say the numbers in order doesn't necessarily indicate that he or she truly understands what they mean. When your child counts different things, he or she comes to realize that four spoons is the same amount as four cookies, and five forks is the same amount as five markers. This kind of number sense is an important foundational math skill.