Counting

Just because children can say the counting words in the right order doesn’t mean that they know how to count. Counting is a complex skill. After learning that numbers come in a special order, children have to learn to count each item exactly once. (This skill is called one-to-one correspondence.) They also have to learn how to stop themselves when they are done, which is one of the hardest skills of all! The best way to teach your child to count is to count early and count often!

Counting Together

Get in the habit of counting out loud with your child. Count any everyday item: stairs, plates, apple slices, birds, mailboxes, or trucks. Count in a rhythm, with claps or other gestures—this helps children who are struggling with one-to-one correspondence. Show your child how to count on his fingers to reinforce what he is seeing with what he is doing and feeling.

The Counting Jar

Fill a clear jar with a small number of items. Have your child count out the items. Arrange them in a line to make counting easier. Don’t worry if your child has a hard time stopping at first. This is normal. It can help to draw out the last number as you count together.

Matching Objects

Once your child can count comfortably, show him how to match the objects in the jar with the same number of another object. Then have him count both groups. This will help your child understand that the same number can refer to lots of different kinds of things.

What Comes Next?

Help challenge your child by occasionally stopping mid-count and saying, “What comes next?” It can also be effective to make an intentional mistake (“Let’s see, we have four people so we need four cups. 1, 3...”) so your child can correct you.

Books to Read

Here are some books you may want to read together:

1, 2, 3 to the Zoo: A Counting Book by Eric Carle
How Many Bugs in a Box?: A Pop-up Counting Book by David A. Carter
10 Black Dots (Los Dies Puntos Negres) by Donald Crews
Roar! A Noisy Counting Book by Pamela Duncan Edwards
My Little Sister Ate One Hare by Bill Grossman
Twenty Big Trucks in the Middle of the Street by Mark Lee and Kurt Cyrus
My First Book of Counting by Chuck Murphy
One Duck Stuck by Phyllis Root
Ten Dirty Pigs/Ten Clean Pigs: An Upside-down, Turn-around Bathtime Counting Book by Carol Roth
Mouse Count (Cuenta de Ratón) by Ellen Stoll Walsh
How Many, How Many, How Many by Rick Walton

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