

Exploring numbers

We use numbers every day – and for a lot more than just counting! Children begin to understand that numbers can be used in different ways when they see people using numbers, and when they begin to use numbers themselves in lots of different practical ways.

Numbers are used for much more than just counting.



Learning about numbers

Children learn about numbers by experiencing them in lots of different situations as part of everyday life – when they are:

- out and about – *house numbers, registration plates etc.*
- shopping – *“We need a pack of four rolls - that’s two each!”*
- having dinner – *“how many fish fingers would you like?”*
- chatting with you – *“We were second in the queue for the post office so didn’t have long to wait.”*
- sharing books and stories – *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*
- singing songs and rhymes – *1, 2, 3, 4, 5...
Once I caught a fish alive*
- playing – *simple counting games*



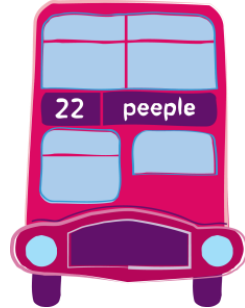
When children have opportunities to explore numbers every day, in lots of different situations, they begin to understand how numbers can be used for different things.

Using numbers in different ways

As adults, we don't think too much about how we use numbers. Every day, without even realising it, we use numbers in lots of different ways:

Numbers as labels

- *the number on a bus*
- *a number 8 on a football shirt*
- *numbers in a postcode*



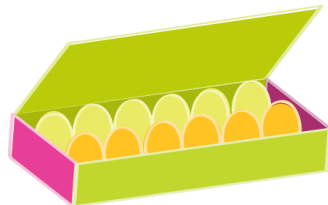
Numbers for counting

- *counting the stairs up to bed*
- *counting the apples as they go into the fruit bowl*
- *5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... blast off!*

Numbers to show quantity

How many there are in a group of things:

- *Anil has four samosas on his plate for lunch*
- *the total number of eggs in the box*
- *a multipack of snacks or fruit*



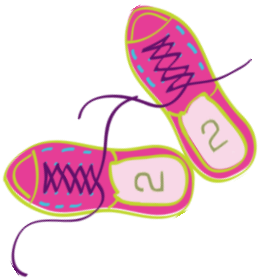
Numbers to show position

The order of something or where it comes in a list:

- *a certificate showing 1st, 2nd or 3rd place etc.*
- *turn to the fourth page in the book*
- *the fifth one is the smallest duck*



Numbers to measure things



- numbers on a clock to measure time
- shoe size
- a birthday card with a number 3 (age 3)
- a price tag – the cost of something
- measuring weight, height, distance etc.

Your child will come to use numbers in these ways in the same way that you did – through hearing and using them as part of everyday life. Exploring and talking about numbers with your child will help them to understand the different ways of using numbers and encourage them to use them for themselves.

Very young children learn that numbers are used in different ways when they see people using numbers, and when they use numbers themselves, as part of everyday life.

Exploring numbers together

Everyday life, songs, stories and games offer lots of opportunities for you and your child to talk about numbers and explore the different ways of using them.

Here are a few ideas to try:

- look out for numbers when you are at home or out and about, e.g. on a TV remote control, a microwave, price tags, street signs, buses, clothing etc.
- count the number of steps when you go upstairs
- play a simple game with dice and counters – who came first and second?
- sing songs and rhymes with numbers in them
- count things in the pictures in story books
- measure your child's height using a simple height chart
- give your child a choice of going first or second etc. when they are doing something, e.g. *“Do you want to have your hair cut first, or second after me?”*
- explore numbers on a walk to the shops:
 - count the number of lampposts you pass – how many did you see in total?



- where did you see numbers on your journey?
- what was the third thing that went into the shopping basket?
- how long did your trip take you?

Enjoy exploring numbers together!