How to Teach Number Concepts to Five-Year-Olds

by Karen LoBello, Demand Media

Even though you’ve been an adult for many years, your mother still reminds you that you’re “bad in math, just like she was.” Those words make you want to run for cover. Help your child develop a good attitude toward math. Provide rich activities so she can make number connections while gaining confidence and a belief that she’s “good in math.” Explore and discuss counting, concepts and symbols, and your child will acquire number sense.

Step 1

Surround your child with numbers. Concentrate on the numbers 1 through 10 and then expand to 20. Buy number puzzles. Read books about counting and numbers. Point to various numbers and ask your child to read them. Have her match numbers to dots on cards. Pay special attention to numerals that look alike, such as 6 and 9 and 1 and 7. Ask your child to jump six times or hop 12 times.

Step 2

Use real-life examples to promote knowledge and understanding of counting. Provide one-to-one interaction as your child counts ordinary items, suggests Dr. Paul Busceni, dean of the School of Education at Kendall College in Chicago. Call his attention to counting as he goes up and down stairs. Ask him to count silverware pieces as he sets the table. Take advantage of everyday opportunities. “How many crayons are in that box?” “How many treats did you give the dog?”

Step 3

Visually represent numbers. Busceni suggests stacking five cookies. Count them individually with your child. Place a number “5,” written on a brightly-colored card, right next to the stack of cookies. Visual learners need to see what five means. Stack items higher as your child advances.

Step 4

Play card games that help your child develop number sense. Any game that involves adding two or more cards together is effective, says Busceni. Dice games such as Bunko are also good choices. Play Candy Land and other board games so you can count with your child as he moves his playing piece along a number of spaces.

Step 5

Take four oranges out of a bag and ask your child to continue counting them as she removes the remaining oranges. Count on from four: “Five, six, seven…” With practice, 5-year-old children typically count to 20. Ask your child what number comes after six. “What number is between seven and eight?” Engage her in dialog about counting and numbers.

Step 6

Ask your child to put two red and three blue blocks in a group. “How many blocks are in this group?” Even though they don’t yet use vocabulary such as “add” or “subtract,” children at this age use
words such as “more” and “less” to compare groups of objects. Help your child create various piles of six blocks: four red and two blue, five red and one blue. Give her eight blocks and tell her to put three of them in a separate group. “Which group has more?” Ask her to make two groups with five green blocks in one and five yellow blocks in the other.

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