

Mama, Teach Me to Count!

Daddy, you should help too. Aunts and uncles, please count with me.

Dear adults, you are playing with me, talking with me, reading to me. Please do not forget to count. This will help me become very comfortable with math when I go to school. Math will open all doors for me. I may become an astrophysicist, politician, or musician. I can become anything I want and I will thank you for it!

For now, I am just a cute toddler.

Ask me how old I am and teach me to tell you the number and show you the appropriate number of fingers. Ask me how old my sister or brother is.

At least once a day count something with me. Touch my little fingers and count them – one, two, three, four, five. Show me the plates on the dinner table and count them. Count the wheels on my toy truck, count the buttons on my doll's dress, count aloud and I will learn these cute words: one, two, three, four, five. They sound like a song, don't they? I can sing them!

When I can confidently say these words without your help, this means I have memorized the names of the numbers. I still may need some help pointing at the objects – you know, to make sure that I touched every object once and did not miss any... Do not forget to ask me: "how many?" It takes a while to realize that the last number I pronounced is actually the number of objects. And you thought that counting was easy!

I have heard math people saying that you have understood something when you can do it and undo it. So if I am so good with counting from one to five and already learning words for higher numbers, ask me to count "backwards" – from five to one. You may hint to me to look at my fingers, hiding one at a time – five, four, three, two, one.

There will be so many new words here! Six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

Counting down from twelve will be difficult for a while. Well, only the first few steps down are difficult, because when I come to five it will be an old story for me.

As I am growing up, talk to me about the meaning and history of these words. I will be fascinated to know that all these "teens" simply mean "ten more than". So my cousin who is fifteen is ten years older than I am. Ten years! Unbelievable!

After teens comes the new word "twenty." This almost sound like "two" with "ty." Does it not mean two tens? Thirty – three tens. Forty – four tens (the spelling is funny here, but save this story for later.) Basically it makes a lot of sense: nineteen is ten more than nine; ninety is nine tens. Just teach me to say hundred and I am up to three digit numbers.

Have you already told me that a hundred comes after ninety nine? Ask me how far I can count. If I say “up to a hundred!” tell me: “that’s true, but you can count further than a hundred – just continue hundred one, hundred two,...

Keep asking how far I can count and keep practicing counting up and down with me. Riding in the car is a great opportunity to count in unison.

Ask me count going down from 23, as I make my ball bounce off the floor: I push it with my hand and say twenty-three, it jumps to the floor and bounce back, I push it with my hand and say twenty two,...

Ask me to count from 123 to 77. At first this would not be easy, but you are right here to help.

My first grade teacher knows that by the end of the first grade I should be able to count up to 120, starting at any number less than 120. They will be teaching me to write numbers, too. I will be the best in my class, because I am so used to doing it at home. I am just comfortable with math. ☺

You know, we do not have to stop here. We can do skip counting together. This is really cool – you can start with any number and skip some numbers and count up and down.

For example, start with 1, skip 1 – 1, 3, 5, 7, ...

Start with 2, skip 1 – 2, 4, 6, 8,... (Did you notice you teach me doubles?)

Actually, you have to talk with my future algebra teacher. Skip counting prepares me for learning arithmetic progressions – do not worry, it is easy. You can start with any number and add the same number every time. In two examples above we were adding two every time.

If you would like to skip count (or, as adults say, create an arithmetic progression) going down, you can subtract the same number every time.

For example: start with 47 and subtract 2 every time: 47, 45, 43, 41,...

It would be helpful if I were doing something as I count. Play clap hands with me: I clap my hands, you clap yours, then our right hands clap to each other, then our left hands clap to each other, then I clap my hands, you clap yours and so on. But every time we clap hands we say a number together. Let’s start with 53 and go down subtracting 3: clap 53, clap 50, clap 47,... ☺

I guess I could do skip counting as I bounce a ball too, but by clapping hands we count together.

What a wonderful thing – family counting. You are building a strong foundation for future success for your little one – one count a day. But who is counting?