

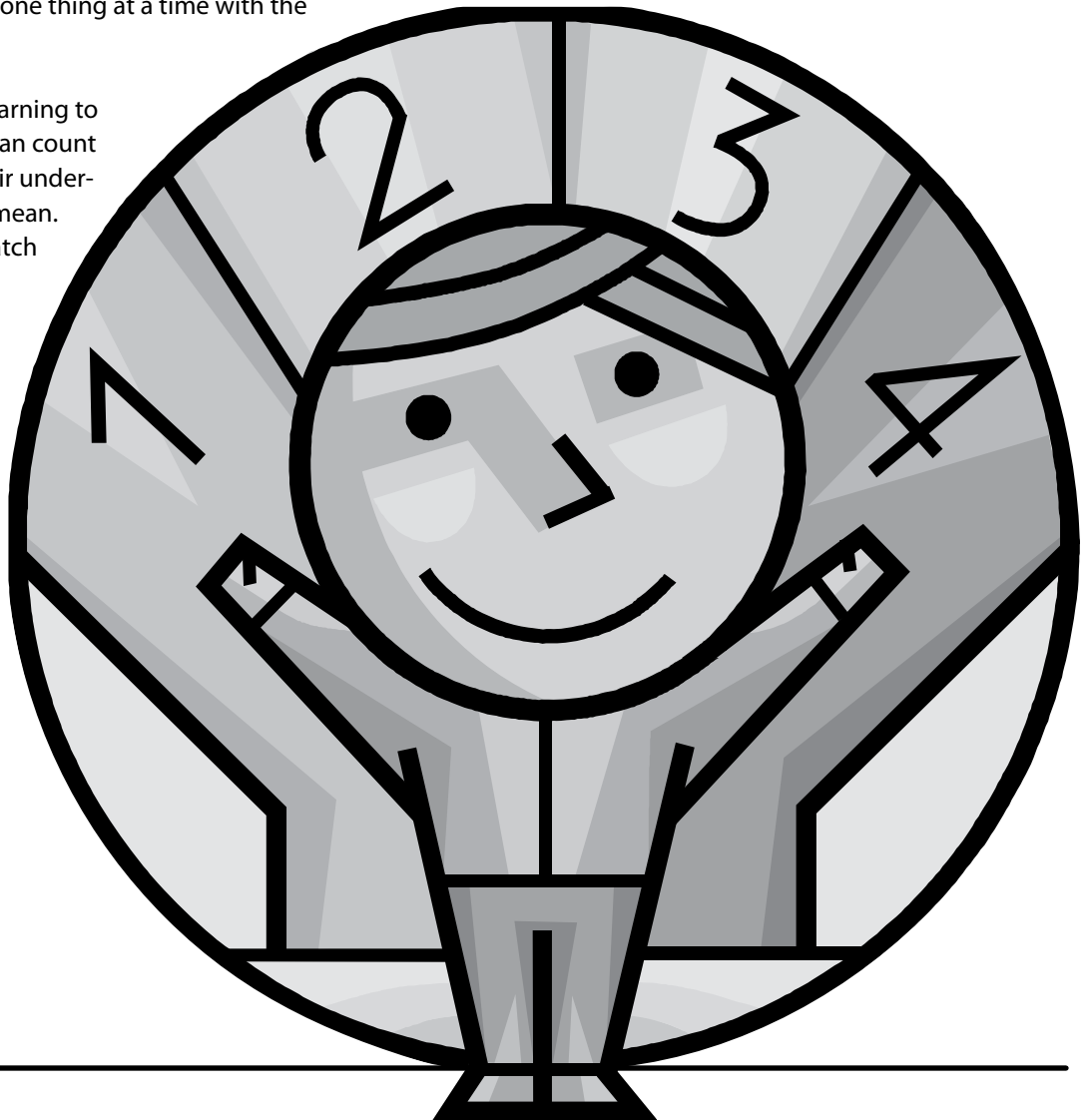
Help children understand the meaning of counting

Teaching children to count involves more than helping them learn the numbers one to ten. It involves helping children understand the meaning of numbers.

Children learn the meaning of numbers when they are developmentally ready. For instance, children ages two to three might move things as they count, but they might count to three while moving four things. This shows that while they might know the numbers in sequence, they are not able to use them to count. At this age, it's great to count together with a child, just for fun. You might count the steps as you walk up them or the buses as they go by. This helps children begin to move towards matching one thing at a time with the number as they say it.

Three- to four-year-olds are still learning to understand quantity. While they can count up to five, they are growing in their understanding of what numbers really mean. By age four to six, children can match the numbers one to ten with ten items; this means they are really counting with meaning. They can solve simple problems, such as how many cookies you will need for each person to have one. By the time children reach the ages of five to seven, they can count items and match them; for example, putting five stamps on five letters.

You can help your child learn to count by making counting a fun part of your day. Count socks as you sort them; count the juice boxes in your refrigerator; count the cars and buses going by. The more experience children have with counting, the more they will learn the meaning of numbers. Understanding the meaning of numbers takes experience with counting lots of things, and you can help by giving your child this experience regularly.



Learning about patterns and sorting

You can help your child get ready for math by giving him chances to think about patterns and to sort things. This skill is both fun and important in learning math. You can use things that you can find outside: pinecones, leaves, sticks, etc. Lay out a pattern with these objects (leaf, leaf, stick, stick, stone) and then repeat the pattern and ask your child to make the same pattern. Most children enjoy this simple game.

You can help your child develop sorting skills when you do your household chores. Ask your child to put the blue towels in one pile and the white in another. As children grow you can challenge them to use two different ways to sort. You might say, "Can you sort these towels by color and then put all the large towels in this basket and all the small ones here on the shelf?"

Learning about shapes and space

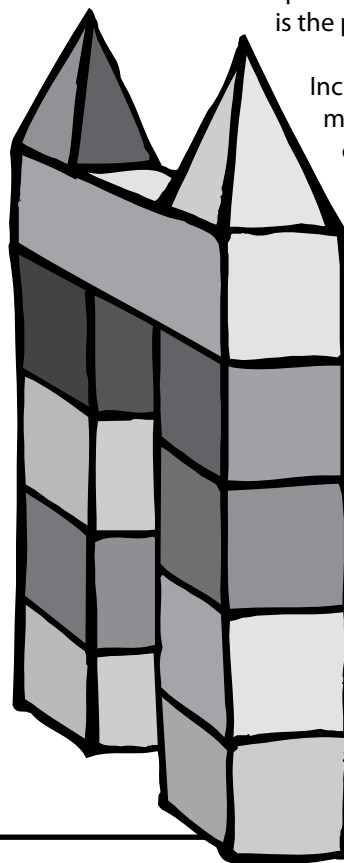
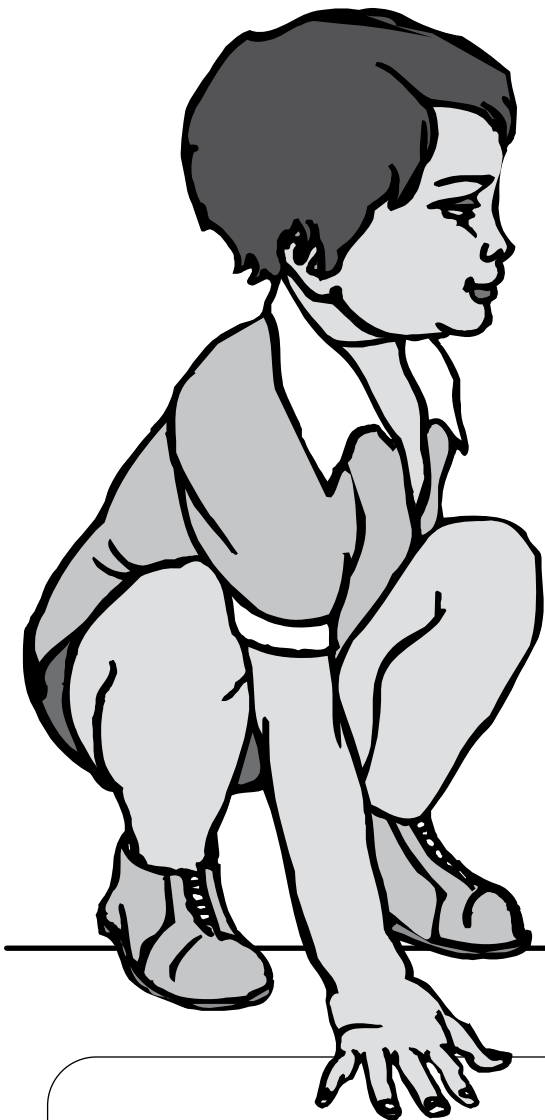
Take time to notice shapes and talk about them with your kids. Shapes are everywhere. A simple walk is a great time to talk about them -- you might see the rectangles made by the fence posts, or the circular manhole covers. As you pick out shapes, your children will learn how to do this as well.

Children learn best about sizes, shapes, and how things fit together by playing. Blocks are a great toy to teach these spatial relationships. Building structures helps children figure out how things can fit together. They learn about what it means to double things in a practical way, when they discover that they need two blocks to fill a space. When children understand the real-life meaning of these things, the idea of multiplying by 2 makes sense.

Learning about measurement

Giving your young child a chance to measure things can help her understand both how and why people measure things. Find real measuring jobs for children to work on. Will this table fit here in this space? How tall are you? How much bigger is the plant than it was a month ago?

Inches, feet, and other units of measurement don't make much sense to a young child. Teach your child to measure with a simple object, such as a shoe. Check how long the rug is with the shoe, or measure the height of a plant with blocks. Then give her a ruler to work on measurement problems. How big a block do we need to fit this space?



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253 Easterly Parkway, State College, PA 16801 • Phone: 800-452-9108 • Website: betterkidcare.psu.edu.

Dr. James E. Van Horn, Better Kid Care Program Director, Lyn Horning, Assistant Director of Programs