

## Snack Time—Number Sense and Counting

### What the Research Says

- In order to count well, young children need to: 1) know the sequence of the numbers (1,2,3...), 2) be able to count aloud with one-to-one correspondence, and 3) understand that the last number counted tells how many objects are in a group.
- **Rote counting** is the naming of the number words in the correct sequence (saying: 1,2,3,4,...).
- **One-to-one correspondence** is the process of touching one object for each number counted aloud.
- Although rote counting is important, children learn far more about counting and numbers if they count aloud *AND* use one to one correspondence (touching an object for every number they say aloud).
- Helping children to “count-on” by adding items to groups of objects prepares for developing addition and subtraction skills.(for example, If your child counts 3 crackers, provide more crackers and encourage your child to “count on” – 4, 5, 6, etc. instead of starting over with 1.)
- By counting small groups of objects, young children learn that the last number in the sequence represents the total quantity of objects.
- Young children learn early mathematical concepts during play and daily routines like snack and mealtime.
- Drawing children’s attention to mathematical concepts like quantity during snack time “mathematizes” this daily routine in ways that are very meaningful and purposeful to the child (for example, How many pieces of bread do we need to make a sandwich?).

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### **Activities for Families**

- Ask your child how many of each item (such as crackers, cookies, apple slices, banana, raisins, etc) is on her plate and count out the items together.
- Engage your child in making decisions during snack time about the quantity of food your child would like to eat such as, Ask, “How many grapes would you like, 5 or 8?” When your child responds, place an amount of grapes on her plate and ask, “Did I give you the right amount?”
- Challenge your child to think about “how many” are in a group. For example “See how many slices you can cut from the banana?” “How many cheerios can you scoop onto your spoon?”
- Create opportunities for you child to problem solve. For example, place three pretzels on one napkin and two pretzels on two napkins. Ask your child, “How many more pretzels are needed so that there is the same number of pretzels on each napkin?”
- Plan a teddy bear tea party with your child. Decide with your child how many teddy bears to invite to the party. Discuss how many chairs, napkins, plates, cups, etc. your child will need for the invited bears.
- Read books that have snack or mealtime themes with your child. Count and discuss the quantities of items that are represented in the book. For example, books with vivid illustrations include, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” “The Very Hungry Caterpillar,” “The Doorbell Rings,” and “Miss Spider’s Tea Party: The Counting Book.”

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### **Advice for Families**

- Make snack time an enjoyable *and* learning experience for you and your child. Follow your child's lead. Use your child's comments and questions to start conversation about numbers and counting.
- Take advantage of daily routines like snack time to help your child learn about numbers. It is much more effective than simply drilling with flashcards.
- Provide opportunities for your child to help in the snack time preparation. These valuable hands-on experiences provide the basis for meaningful conversations about numbers and counting.
- Encourage your child to help pour, measure, and stir mixtures like pancake batter. This builds important background knowledge about how their world works and provides a basis for conversations about numbers and counting.
- Invest time making numbers and counting fun! Quality conversations contribute greatly to mathematical learning.