Building 'Number Sense'

Children need to have plenty of experience and opportunities to explore number to help them to develop 'number sense'. This is the ability to be able to see and manipulate numbers in different ways. The following activities and games can be used at home to support your child.

- Throwing numbers: Tell your child a number can they quickly hold up that many fingers? You could also play this game by rolling a dice.
- Bunny ears: Similar to 'throwing numbers', but child holds up their fingers on their head like 'bunny ears' e.g. 7 could be made with 3 fingers on one hand and 4 on the other. Can they do the same number in a different way? How many ways can they find?
- Board games played with dice, like snakes and ladders.
- Roll a dice can you do an action that number of times? E.g. hop on one leg or clap.
- Arrange objects such as counters in patterns like those found on a dice . Can you arrange the same number in a different way? Ask 'what's the same; what's different?'.
- Adult to arrange the counters like a dice pattern can your child see how many there are without counting them? Draw attention to how the numbers are made up e.g. you might be able to see 4 and 1 more and know the total is 5, or 3 and 3 and know the total is 6.
- Arrange a number of small objects. Adult to hide some can your child work out how many are hidden, based on how many they can still see? E.g. I have 6 objects. I have hidden some. I can still see 2 objects. How many did I hide?
- Put out playing cards face up (numbers 1 to 10). Find pairs of cards that add to make 10 e.g. 4 and 6. This can also be played with other numbers, e.g. Make six by finding 2 and 4, or 3 and 3. The last person that can find a pair of cards is the winner. You could also play this game with cards face down, like 'pairs', or it could be played like 'snap'.
- One more / one less: Put playing cards face down like playing 'pairs'. Turn over a card. Can you find a number that is one more (or one less)? (e.g. child turns over 5, then must try to find 6). This game can also be played as 'two more / two less', or be played like 'snap'.
- Use a number of small objects such as pasta shapes. How many different ways can you put them into two (or more) bowls? Can you write the ways you did it? E.g. 5 could be split into 1 and 4, or 2 and 3.
- Write the numbers 2 to 12 randomly over a sheet of paper. Roll two dice and cross out the total they make (e.g. roll 6 and 5, cross out 11). Keep going until all the numbers have been crossed out. The person who crosses out the last number is the winner.
- Adult lays out a number of small items. Show them for a short amount of time then hide them. Can your child work out how many they saw? Can they draw the same number of dots, in the same arrangement? By only showing for a short time, your child won't be able to count them, so they will need to use what they know – e.g. they might have noticed 3 objects and another 3 objects when they looked, so know there were 6.
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- Make up some of your own games like the ones above!