

## *Counting Never Tasted So Good*

**Cost:** None

**Mess factor:** Little

**Suggested location:** Kitchen

### **Experiences your children will have**

- Indicating *more*
- Using a number word
- Counting by rote (saying numbers by memorization)
- Counting with one-to-one correspondence (developing a sense of number; touching each object and associating one number with each object counted)

### **Materials**

- Finger foods (e.g., dry cereal; crackers; small pieces of fruit, vegetables, or meat)

### **Beginning**

Place a small amount of food on your child's plate or highchair tray (keep more food on the table in a bowl/plate so children can see that there will be more available). Give your child time to pick up each piece of food and eat it. Talk about the food you've given your child, for example, "Your crackers are all gone!"

### **Middle**

When their plate or tray is empty, young toddlers might indicate that they want more by reaching for the bowl or plate of food and/or by making a vocalization. Ask, "Do you want *more* bananas?" You may want to repeat the word *more* again and/or make the sign for *more* (look online for the American Sign Language image of how to sign *more*). Over time, if you repeat *more* to your toddler, you will find that they will begin saying or signing *more* when wanting more of something.

If your child has already moved beyond this developmental stage, count out loud (e.g., "1, 2, 3, 4, 5") when your toddler asks you for more of a food item as you place the items on their tray or plate. Over time, you will notice your child will begin using number words or start counting by rote; it's okay if he or she doesn't understand what each number means because experimentation with number words and rote counting is an important step in learning to count. Encourage your child's attempts at using number words and continue to model counting.

Older toddlers who have had practice saying number words will begin counting with one-to-one correspondence, starting with a just a few objects and gradually counting up to 10 or more objects.

**End**

This activity isn't meant to be a "counting drill and practice"; rather, it's meant to be an ongoing, natural process throughout mealtimes. The activity will draw to a close as the mealtime ends.

**Cleanup**

If your child enjoys their meal, there may be few edible "materials" to put away! Children may enjoy assisting in clearing or putting silverware into the dishwasher.

**Younger children**

Give your infant a single object to touch or handle (e.g., a rattle, bottle, teething ring) to teach your child the concept of *one*.

**Older children**

Older children will begin recognizing single-digit numbers. They will count to 10 and then beyond (using one-to-one correspondence) and will understand that the last number they count tells "how many."

**Hints**

- It's natural for children who are rote counting or counting with one-to-one correspondence to occasionally or consistently skip a number when counting (such as "1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7") or repeat a number when counting (such as "1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6"). The most effective way to correct your beginning counter is to continue modeling by counting the numbers in the right order.
- When you finish counting a set of objects ("1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8"), tell children how many you have when you are finished ("I have eight goldfish crackers!").

**More!**

Model *more* by saying or signing the word when your child wants more of a particular toy or item, another swing at the park, or another book to read.

To encourage your toddler to use number words or count by rote, count out loud when your toddler is climbing up steps or asking you to add blocks to their tower.

Have your child join you in counting with one-to-one correspondence (e.g., lining up three plastic bears and placing a marble by each).

**Special needs accommodations**

Frequently model the sign for *more* to help toddlers with developmental delays communicate *more*. Count with your toddler frequently, modeling the correct order of numbers, and encourage them to point to or touch each object as you count.