

Exploring numbers and counting with chocolate coins

By their third birthday many children will repeat the names of numbers they have been introduced to in rhymes, stories and everyday activities. To start with they will often say the names randomly or out of sequence. As they become more confident in saying the names in order you can help them to develop their understanding of how numbers work using familiar objects.

Usually between 30 to 50 months

Learning to match numbers with their names

The first step is for you to place the coins down in a line giving them a number name as you go 1-2-3-4-5. Five objects are plenty to work with for most pre-school children and three is good to start with. The next step is for you to both touch the coins and say the number. If your child can do this confidently they may like to have a go at doing it on their own. Be ready to join in to help if they need it. It's important for the activity to be enjoyable and confidence giving. You can repeat the final number 'there are *three* coins' to help them understand that the last number they count is the total. You can repeat this activity using different sets of familiar objects.



Usually between 40 and 60 months

Understanding that the last number counted is the number of objects in the group

With an older pre-schooler who is confident at matching objects to number names, take the net of chocolate coins (or anything else that motivates your child) ask them to count out three (or five). Point to each and count them together. Now pick the same coins up and put them in a pile. Ask your child how many there are? To begin with they will most likely re-count the pile. Notice that there are still three (or five). Put them out in a line. How many now? It's the same again. You can do this activity with other everyday objects.



Usually between 40 to 60 months

Subitising or 'just knowing'

When we get more experienced with numbers we often don't need to count small quantities, we just know how many there are. This is called subitising. You can help your child to learn this skill by practising. Put out small numbers of coins up to five – how many? Practice with small numbers of everyday things that can easily be seen in one go – socks, building bricks, spoons... with practice your child will begin to know how many there are without counting.



Usually between 40 to 60 months

How many altogether?

A child who can count a set of five objects accurately will enjoy exploring how you can separate the five objects in different ways and still count them to a total of five. Lay out five coins in a line and slide one away a little to make a space. Count the four coins. Count the one coin. Count all of the coins. How many altogether? Split them in different ways and count. Say the three numbers each time. Ask 'show me some more?' and let your child take the lead.

