



12 Activities to Help Build Number Sense (Grades K-2)

First, what is number sense? It's a person's understanding of number concepts, operations like addition and subtraction, and the application of numbers and operations. This group of key math abilities includes estimation, measurement, relative size (more, less), number relationships, and mental math. Try these activities to help your child build number sense:

Asking Questions to Build Number Sense

1. Ask question to help your child develop a strong sense of numbers.

Which is most/greatest? How do you know? Which is least/smallest? How do you know? What else can you tell me about those numbers? About how much would that be? How did you get that answer? Does that make sense?

Using Counting to Build Number Sense

- 2. Set the table with your child.** Count "1, 2, 3..." as you place plates. Then do the same for forks, spoons, cups, etc.
- 3. Count, count, count!** Give your child sets of items... books, fruit, stuffed animals, etc. Have your child count how many items are in each set.
- 4. Matching numbers.** Using a deck of cards (remove face cards), have your child flip a number card over and count out a set of things to match the numeral.
- 5. Write the number words** *zero* through *ten* on individual index cards. Have your child read each card and count out a set of items that match the number word.
- 6. Use "counters" to count on.** Give your child a set of 10 "counters." You can use small items you have around the house like 10 buttons or 10 paperclips. Have your child line up their counters, left to right, on a table. Tell your child to count four counters and push them under his or her left hand. Then say, "Point to your hand. How many are there? (4) So, let's **count on** from 4. (Point to hand covering counters) That's 4, 5, 6,...." Repeat with different numbers.

Playing Games to Build Number Sense

- 7. Dominoes—One-Less-Than.** In traditional dominoes, players match "ends" with equal numbers of dots. With One-Less-Than (More-Than) Dominoes, use a regular set of dominoes to play, but the new domino is placed if it has one less dot than the end. For instance, if the open end has four dots, the player could place a domino with three dots to "match because 3 is One-Less-Than 4. A similar game can be played with two less, one more, or two more.
- 8. Playing Cards—All in a Row.** Remove all face cards. The deck should include the ace, which counts as the 1, and number cards 2–10 in all suits. Place cards face down. The first player draws a card and places it in his or her line in sequential order... ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 10. If the player draws a duplicated card, it is placed in the discard pile and the other player has the option to choose that card. The first player to sequence the cards from ace to 10 wins.
- 9. Playing Cards—War Sums:** This card game is played like the traditional game of War. Cards are equally divided between partners. Each player pulls a card from his stack. The first player to correctly say the sum of the two cards gets to keep both cards. Players then each pull another card from their decks and continue. Play continues until one player has won all of the cards. (Alternate: Set a timer and the player with the most cards when time is up is the winner.) For Kindergarten students, play in the traditional way by comparing the numbers on the cards and the highest-value card wins (comparing whole numbers).
- 10. Dice—One More/Less and Two More/Less:** Roll dice. Build a set of counters that is one more than number rolled.
- 11. Dice—Sequencing:** Roll two or more dice to create a number. Write the number(s) that comes before and after. (Can extend counting sequence to five numbers before generated number and five after.)
- 12. Dice—Basic Facts:** Roll two dice and compute the sum.

