

## EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE INFORMATION FOR EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

### Developing Early Number Skills: Counting

Initially children learn to **recite numbers**. They learn that we recite numbers **in the same order** – we always count 1,2,3, never 2,1, 3.

- ✓ Sing rhymes and songs (eg '*One-two buckle my shoe*'; '*One potato, two potato*'; '*one two three four five, once I caught a fish alive*'). Note that many songs teach children to count backwards which is a harder skill.
- ✓ Count candles on a birthday cake, children in the group, steps as they walk

Children learn to recite numbers quite early but this does not mean that they actually understand **what the numbers mean**. As counting skills develop, children start to understand:

**One-to-one correspondence:** When a child counts each object and says the number.

- ✓ Teach children to count out loudly slowly while moving the object to one side.
- ✓ Count the same items arranged in a different order (eg straight line – easier; circle – harder)
- ✓ Count objects that can be touched but not moved such as objects in a picture.

**Conservation of number:** Children need to understand that 3 objects are always 3 objects however they are arranged.

- ✓ Making patterns with the same amount of objects helps children to recognise small amounts instantly.
- ✓ Count groups of identical objects (eg bricks) and also groups of mixed objects (eg block, doll, toy car).
- ✓ Re-count groups of objects starting with a different one each time to teach children that the order in which they are counted does not affect the total in the set.

**The cardinal principle:** The final number that the child counts represents how many are in the set or group. The child must therefore be able to stop on the last number of the count and recognise that the number tells us how many there are altogether eg '*1 2 3... there are three blocks*'.

**Most importantly, make it fun!**