Counting Forward and Backward

Age: Preschool-age (3-4 years)

This activity helps your child's development in this domain: Cognitive

What You Need:

• Small items to count such as dried beans, buttons, pennies, or pieces of cereal
• Small bags or bowls for each family member

What To Do:

1. Label each bag or bowl with a family member’s name.
2. Place the beans or other small items in a separate bowl and explain to your child that you are going to divide the objects and give each family member the same number of items.
3. Have her help you put one item in each person’s bowl, counting as she does this: “One for Daddy, one for Mommy, one for brother, and one for me.” Ask her to continue adding to the bowls until all the items are distributed.
4. Count the items in each person’s bowl with her. For example, “How many beans does Daddy have? Let’s count: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Daddy has five beans.”
5. Do the same for every bowl and discuss how many each person has.
6. If you speak more than one language, count in another language.

VARIATION:

When your child is familiar with counting forward (1, 2, 3, 4, and so on),
practice counting backward (…4, 3, 2, 1). For example, you could say, “You have five beans in your bowl. If you take one out, how many do you have left?” Have your child take out a bean and count the beans left in the bowl. Ask her if she has “more” or “less” beans. Continue to do this with each bean until there are none left in the bowl.

! Safety Alert: Remind your child not to put small objects in her mouth. They can get stuck in her throat and cause choking (and even death). When you are done using small objects, put them away where your child cannot reach them. Childproofing your home creates a safe place for your child to explore and learn.