

Note to Parents

For eleven years I taught elementary math intervention. One of the most common skills that the younger kids struggled with was counting beyond ten. The teens are often called “the tricky teens,” because “eleven,” “twelve,” and “thirteen” don’t follow a pattern. Once you hit “**fourteen**,” “**fifteen**,” “**sixteen**,” and so on, there is a pattern, and kids pick these numbers up more easily. In some Asian languages, the numbers after 10 are literally 10-1, 10-2, 10-3, etc. I have often wondered if kids would have fewer problems in math if English had adopted this logical custom!

Counting backward is even more difficult. Most often kids skip the number 13 when counting backward, which means their answer will be off by one if they use the counting down strategy to subtract. Before I retired, I always told myself that someone needed to write a book that counted not just to ten, but to thirteen, both forward and backward. Well, I finally gave up waiting, and just wrote the book myself! When I wrote the book, I knew that staircases usually have 13 steps, so that was a natural setting for the story.



On the next page you will find a few ideas for activities that will help young kids develop critical early numeracy skills. In each activity, take turns, modeling counting for your child when it is your turn. You can also use the games as opportunities to practice vocabulary words, like “before” and “after” or “larger” and “smaller.” Once your child learns it, the card game can be played as a solitaire game. In addition, the card game can be extended as your kids grow older, to teach concepts such as multiplication and division. To do so, play the game as written, but lay the cards out by a number other than ones, for example, 3, 6, 9...30. When they flip the cards over and turn one up, they will need to count by threes to find the target card.

Counting Activities—Take turns with your child and model counting on your turn.

1. Anything you do forward you do backward. This will make subtraction easy for your child once he starts learning it.
2. Start counting at numbers other than one. First graders often told me they could count all the way to 100, but if I asked them to start counting at 7 and count forward, they just looked at me like a deer in the headlights! It's much more important that a young child can count from any number (forward and backward—see #1) in the range of 1-30, than that they're able to count from 1 to 100.
3. Write numbers on paper plates and tape them on the side of the staircase, so that you can count them going up and down. You can also use them (or cards) to mix the numbers up and help your child put them in order on the floor.
4. Once the child can identify the numbers and put them in order, you can flip the plates/cards over so they can't see the numbers. With the numbers in sequence, flip over one number, and put a marker (penny, paper clip, etc.) on another number. Have your child count from the visible number up to the number with the marker on it. Once they get to that number, they can flip the card over to see if they are correct. Repeat going backwards with two different plates/cards.
5. Count the stars in Harry's room with your child. If there are too many, cover some of the stars with your hand, and ask your child to count the ones they can see.
6. On the page where the animals are all on the stairs in the dark, point to one of the pairs of eyes, and see if your child knows which stuffed animal it is. If they don't know or are unsure, show them how to count up to see what step the animal is on, and then check one of the earlier pages to see which animal is on the corresponding step. Take turns picking an animal and trying to figure out who it is, modeling the counting-up strategy on your turn.
7. On the page with a picture of Harry and the gang singing, there is a QR code. You can use the camera on your phone to hear a helpful song, (sung to the tune of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*), that your child can learn to count to 21 both forward and backward.