

## Counting

Many children join us at Shadwell Childcare with the beginnings of counting knowledge. Parents often tell us “They know all their numbers...they can count to 20...” which shows how amazing those early experiences at home, or other settings have been for planting those counting ‘seeds’.

At Shadwell Childcare, we have had lots of maths training to make sure we are supporting our children’s learning to deepen their knowledge and understanding of numbers and counting. Yes, we value that a lot of children may “remember” the pattern of numbers from 1 to ten, or beyond, but we help them to know what that means, and give them the foundations of counting skills they can continue to develop through their life.

### Have you ever heard of the 5 Counting Principles?

Don’t let that label scare you. It may sound complicated, but the counting principles are simply 5 ways to embed counting in different ways. Let’s have a look in more detail...



#### The One-To-One Principle

*“I can count each object only once and say one number name for each item”*

When they count their cars do they touch each one as they count? When they tidy up, do they count as they drop objects into the box? This is your child’s way of perfecting that one-to-one principle. At home, count every day! Count their socks, count out the steps up to bed, count the raisins they have for snack. Count anything you can touch or move to model that each object is ‘one’. Encourage your child to arrange objects in lines to help them keep track of what has been counted.

#### The Stable Order Principle

*“When I count, I say the numbers in order. This order always stays the same.”*

“One, two, three, four, five. Once I caught a fish alive”

I wonder how many times you have sang this song? Did you know you were helping your children to learn the stable order principle? By saying numbers in the correct order aloud with your children, you are helping them to learn this important skill. You can count in songs, books and as they play. Just fill their world with those numbers and they will listen and soak it all up!

## The Cardinal Principle

*“When I count the objects in a group, the last number I say tells me the total for the group”*

If you were given a bag of pennies, you might be heard saying “one, two, three.....eighteen, nineteen, TWENTY!” changing your voice as you counted that final coin. This is the cardinal principle – knowing that the last number you say is how many were there altogether. When we count with children this is a great habit to model. You can deepen this learning by affirming what they have said and bring their focus to that last number “...six, seven, eight, nine, TEN...Wow! You have 10 spots on your T-shirt!”



## The Abstraction Principle

*“I can count anything. Even things that cannot be touched or seen”*

This is a tricky one to master and relies on your child being confident with the previous three principles first. It’s harder to keep track of your counting if you can’t touch or move the objects, so this one takes lots of practice. We can support this through counting objects of different shapes and sizes, and pointing and each object if they can’t actually touch them. A great example of this is when we count our friends at nursery during the register. Modelling “touching heads” means that we now have 32 helpers at carpet time who point as we count how many children are here each day!





## The Order-Irrelevance Principle

*“It doesn’t matter which order I count a group of objects in, the total will be the same”*

This is all about flexibility. Now that our children know that each object is “one” from a total number, this principle helps them understand that this group can be counted in another way, but it doesn’t change the total. If we line up a row of 5 footballs, there will still be 5 if we

count them left-right, right-left, or mix them all up. The red ball may not always be number 3, but we will have 5 balls altogether, every time we count them.

So, there are the 5 Counting Principles... not so scary after all! If you can have a go at all of these at home, you will be helping your child to deepen their knowledge of number and counting. It’s really important to remember, our children are two, three and four years old, and learn through *play*. At nursery we value “in the moment” counting as they play, alongside counting routines and activities. Make counting fun and they will learn!

We hope this guide has been helpful. If you have any questions or would like some more information, please ask a member of staff and we’ll be happy to help!