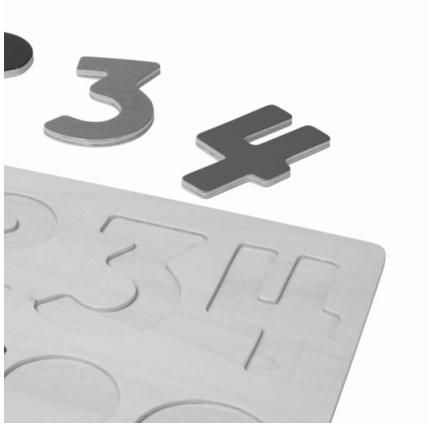
Mental calculations

Ways to help your child



We use mental calculations everyday when we go shopping, split bills at a restaurant, play games or cook.

The methods that we use when we work things out in our heads are often not the same methods that we use when we write down a sum.

How children learn to do mental calculations

Children begin by counting things that they see and using objects to add and subtract. Through practice, children will begin to think of ways to add and subtract without having to use objects.

One of the early ways in which children learn to add two numbers mentally is to start with the larger number and count on by ones to add the second number.

This is an effective way when adding on small numbers. As children begin to deal with large numbers, they develop a range of ways other than counting by ones.

One of the interesting things about mental calculations is that we do not all think the same way.

For example, to find the answers to 25 + 89, children could:

- make the 89 up to 90, then add 10 and then 14 or
- add 20 and 80 to make 100, then add 9 and 5, then add 100 and 14 or
- add 10 twice to 89 and then add 5 more.

What you can do at home

You can foster the development of using mental strategies to solve a problem by asking your child to work out the following:

- Ask your child to mentally work out how much change he or she will get when paying for an item at the shops
- If your child is saving to buy an item, ask how much more money he or she will need to save before being able to buy it
- Encourage your child to estimate the cost of two items when shopping
- If watching a game that involves two teams, ask your child to work out mentally the difference in the scores.

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